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Altered Fairytale

by [Violetscented](#)

Summary

This is canon divergence/AU story set in EF (FTL) which shows what would have happened if Regina had run off with Daniel and if Emma had grown up with her parents. But most of all it shows what would have happened when fate brought the two women together and they slowly realised that they were perfect for each

other. SwanQueen with past DragonQueen and a quick mention of StableQueen.

Notes

Author's note: Hello readers. Thank you for giving this story a read! I just wanted to let you know that the narration style of this story will change after the first chapter, so if you don't like the fairy tale style of it... just hang in there. As always I am very grateful for reviews and comments and you can find me on Tumblr as violetscentedwriter , on Facebook where I'm called Violet Scented or on Twitter where I'm VioletscentedSQ . Come say hello!

Where the old story starts but ours takes over

Once upon a time a young woman named Regina saved a young, spoiled Princess from a runaway horse, not suspecting that this was orchestrated by her power-hungry mother, who sought to have the Princess ask her widowed father to marry Regina. This despite that Regina loved another, a young and humble stable boy who returned her love with full force. One fateful night the young Princess found Regina in the arms of her stable boy and was later coerced to spill the secret to Regina's mother.

We all know the woe and misery that followed, we have seen how the young, innocent Regina met Rumplestiltskin and was turned into a magic-wielding monster of bitterness and hate to be called *the Evil Queen*. However, what would have happened if this did not come to pass? What would have happened if the stable boy that the young woman loved had prepared an escape for himself and his ladylove? What if they stole away in the night, before the Princess could see them and alert Regina's mother of their secret love?

Well, then Regina's mother and father would join with the King to search for the lost woman, not knowing why she had left or suspecting that she might not be alone. If the stable boy, Daniel, and his Regina were wily and bold they might just keep hidden and disguised as traveling paupers. The King and the parents of the lost girl would have to give up their search for a lone, noble woman walking on foot while the two lovers went far away on a stolen horse and in disguise.

Soon the King and the devastated young Princess would get over their loss and set their sights on a new young woman to take the role as Queen. While Regina's parents, although never giving up on finding their daughter one day, would have to resign themselves to that their daughter would never be King Leopold's wife.

And Regina and Daniel? Would they live happily ever after? No, fate never had a simple and happy fairytale in mind for Regina. She was always destined for heartbreak just as Daniel was destined for death. If events had unfolded like we have just seen, Daniel would lose his life to an unfortunate kick to the face from a scared, sickly horse when taking a temporary job at a stable which they passed on their way to search for a new home. So, Regina would once again be left without her Daniel but this time she was also left without a home and a family, being too proud and too fond of her newfound freedom to return to home to receive her grave, magical punishment for running away.

What could she do? She would have to travel on, hoping to find some employment somewhere while fighting the grief and loneliness which bled her heart every night as she tried to sleep. With far too heavy a burden on her young shoulders, Regina arrived in a small village and was taken in by a kind farmer who gave her food and shelter in return for help with his temperamental horse. So it continued for a few months until the farm hit on hard times and could not feed yet another mouth, Regina moved on and drifted around with no other company than the horse that she and Daniel had stolen from her parents.

Regina was too proud to beg for her food and not able to fulfil any real profession as she had never shown aptitude for needlework nor any other skills that a young noble woman could have learned. All Regina knew was how to take care of horses and there was an abundance of people with that skill, most of them strong broad-shouldered men who would always get the employment instead of her. Unless the employer eyed the painfully beautiful woman up and down and asked if she had anything else to offer him as his employee of course. Regina would always turn this down, she would rather starve than end up someone's unwilling vessel for filthy lusts. And so, starve is what she began to do. She sold the horse for food and occasional shelter but that only lasted for so long.

Many would have perished at this point of Regina's story, or succumbed to the offers of lurid men. Regina Mills was different,

whether you call it strength or stubbornness, she fought on until her fighting against fate's cold hands finally led her up into the mountains.

On one particularly cold night she realised that she had ventured as far as the forbidden mountain where the infamous Forbidden Fortress loomed. Regina knew that her parents had whispered of danger surrounding this place but she had not been let in on its secrets, however, it mattered little now as the cold had entered her bones and her stomach was past the point of growling.

Desperate for work or pity, Regina made herself use the cold, rusted metal knocker and expected to see a servant open the door. What she saw instead was a well-dressed, tall, ash-blond woman with a haughty look who glared at her and sneered "what do you want?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Milady. I just... wanted to enquire if you had any work for me? Or if you would allow me to sleep in your stables or barn tonight? I have lost everything and I just need a warm place to sleep", Regina pleaded as dignified as she could be while shivering with cold and hunger.

"Well now, from your way of speaking I would say that you are no runaway farmer's daughter, which explains your unbelievable cheek in coming here begging for my mercy. Why would I help the likes of you?"

Regina did not feel shamed or embarrassed at these words, she felt angry and mistreated and her rage, never far from her heart, began to build in her.

"Just allow me to sleep in your stables for one night and I swear that you will never see me again", Regina asked through gritted teeth, trying to keep her rage at bay.

"Filthy little waif, why would I have stables? Don't you know where you are, girl? I am Maleficent, I can turn into a dragon and fly wherever I please – what use do I have of horses? And what use do I

have of taking pity on little mice like you? Begone", she snarled and shot a volley of magic towards Regina.

Now this was the point where Maleficent expected Regina to fly across the air and land in the cold mud, only to scatter away frightened. This is not what happened.

What happened was that the building rage and desperation in Regina made her lift her hand to strike at Maleficent just as the volley of magic hit, unknowingly having magic of her own, Regina's hand returned the magic with an added bonus of some of her own coarse magic and the unexpected thrust of it shot Maleficent backwards instead.

The tall woman landed painfully in the hall of her dank castle and stared confusedly back at Regina. The young brunette was looking at her hand, wondering what she had just done. She had only ever seen magic when her mother had performed it and never suspected that she herself would have the gift too.

Maleficent gave a hoarse little laughter that echoed along the bare walls.

"Well, well, well... looks like the little mouse has magic. Now that is rare in these parts! However, by the look on your face you don't know how to control it. It so happens that I have considered getting an apprentice for company and to do my tedious tasks, perhaps you *could* stay here. However, if you do I will expect two things. First, you *always* obey me. Secondly, you will learn magic and use it to MY advantage. Do you agree?"

Desperate for shelter, food and a purpose in life Regina didn't hesitate. She looked her new teacher right in the eye and calmly said "yes, Maleficent. I understand and I agree."

The problem with Emma

"Emma! Have you seen the little black lamb down there?"

Princess Emma cast an amused glance at her father who sat on the other seat in the carriage and stared happily out at a field of grazing sheep that they were passing.

Before she had time to reply he continued, "oh sweetheart, don't you love lambing season?"

Emma beamed at him. "Not as much as you do, father dearest."

The carriage shook as they went over a stone on the road and it seemed to sober her overexcited parent up. He straightened and reminded himself that he was a King and should carry himself with dignity, masculinity and gravitas as his wife, the beautiful Snow White, had always said. Although he suspected that his wife loved him just as much for his bouts of childlike enthusiasm as for his heroic King persona.

Emma wished that she could be as carefree as her father was right now. Sure, she wasn't exactly shaking with nerves, but she still felt uneasy under her smiling façade.

They were going to see yet another possible suitor and she could pretty much guess the outcome. They would show up and see the castle, be introduced to the King and Queen and any sons they might have and then it would start, the by now familiar dance. Her father would slowly try the waters, knowing full well that his more diplomatic wife had already done this via correspondence, and see how they responded to the idea of having Emma as their daughter in law.

Usually that was when the foreign Royals would begin to be nervous and try to show that they were only being polite and not interested in

the blonde young Princess, and that was the people who her mother thought might be possible candidates.

The problem was Emma's magic. The Enchanted Forest was a realm filled with magic and yet the fear and paranoia against people who could wield had grown strong. Everyone would speak of the scourge of Rumplestiltskin and Maleficent and a few other sorcerers trying to take power, seeking revenge on the noble houses of the realm and generally spreading death and pain in their wake.

Now King James (called Charming by most everyone) and Queen Snow had a problem, no one wanted to marry their son off to a woman who on her 18th birthday had accidentally turned all the male servants into crabs when she caught a footman peering at her in the bath.

In fact, they were getting so desperate that they had even decided that if Emma was still unwed on her 25th birthday, which was only six months away, they would have to consult Rumplestiltskin, something they had only done a few rare times when they were younger, due to the hideous price his magic always came with.

For now, they still had a few Royal houses to try and pawn Emma off on and today's visit would tick another one off the list. Emma was growing weary of seeing the hesitation in people's eyes. They saw a kind, clever, beautiful and naturally *charming* Princess and wanted very much to make her a part of their family... but then they remembered her magic and feared the idea of transformed into something unsavoury or waking up to their beds being on fire.

No matter how much Emma's parents tried to explain that Emma had the benign light magic, people only seemed to hear the word *magic* and recoil. Even the unsociable fairies had been sought out to convince people that magic could be a good thing, but the fairies were more interested in their own matters and felt that Emma should simply avoid using magic and leave that to the experts.

Like Emma had a choice, if she could extinguish her magic like she blew out a candle, she would. But it was always there, showing up at

the most inopportune moments, and she didn't seem to be any closer to controlling it despite her years of practising. She was just too frightened of the magic to be able to figure out how to either control it or remove it.

As they rode on towards this new faraway castle and its Princes which would all spurn her, whether they wanted to or not, she looked at her hands. They were covered in white gloves and Emma imagined the white fabric shielding her from the magic that sometimes sprung from those hands.

Her father caught her looking and guessed at her thoughts.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I hear the King and Queen of Swordsbane are very understanding and brave people. I'm sure that a little magic won't frightened away young Prince Jacob", he said with a reassuring smile.

She looked at him and her daughterly stare saw right through his words and found the important bit of information lurking there. "Young Prince Jacob?" Emma asked with a piercing look.

Her father squirmed where he sat and tried to change the topic by looking for more cute lambs on the nearby field.

Emma sighed and repeated her question more pointedly. "*Young* Prince Jacob? How old is he?"

Charming mumbled something under his breath.

"Excuse me? What did you say?" Emma asked.

"He's just turned sixteen", her father mumbled as a blush crept into his cheeks.

"Sixteen?!" Emma groaned and hid her face in her gloved hands.

"I know he is a bit young for you, but age is just a number", Charming coaxed.

"It's not that I am about eight years older than him that bothers me, it's that he is basically a child!" Emma shouted at her still blushing father.

He put his hand on hers to try and calm her. "Don't be overdramatic, Emma. You know very well that most Royals are wed and on the way to their first child before they reach 20."

"I don't care how many children he plans to put in my belly, I still won't know what to talk to him about! Should we discuss his new rocking horse over supper? Or maybe his skill with learning his numbers and letters?"

"He is *sixteen*, not *six*, sweetheart", Charming said meekly.

"He is my little brother at best and you know it!" Emma said, suddenly deflated.

With a wretched sigh she continued, "oh, what does it matter. His parents will tell him to avoid me like the plague anyway. And you know what? I wouldn't even mind that if it wasn't for the fact that every marriage opportunity that's missed breaks Mother's heart a little more. I am quite happy being on my own."

"I know you are, sweetheart. But Emma, it's no way to live your life in the long run. We don't want to see you lonely and without family when we pass away", her father said quietly.

Suddenly Emma felt horrible and hurried to take her father's hand.

"I'm sorry, Father. I know you and Mother want me to marry and *I am trying* it's just...", she trailed off.

"...it's just that people fear your magic", her father continued for her.

She nodded sadly and in a gesture that showed the family resemblance they both turned to look out at the passing landscape with a furrowed brow at the same time.

The shop and the magic in her veins

Chapter Notes

Author's note: For those of you hoping to read more about Regina and Maleficent, you will have to wait to find out about their history, I promise that it is coming though! I also want to say thank you for the lovely reviews/comments and tell you how happy I am that so many of you have read *Scent of Roses* and recognised the crab joke (my little Easter egg as they call it) in the last chapter.

Regina gazed at her reflection in the ornate wooden mirror which hung in the back room of her shop. She removed a smudge of her wine-red lipstick from the apex of her cupid's bow, as she did so her eyes trailed to the scar just above her lip. It was a constant reminder of that afternoon five years ago, that long afternoon which ended with her leaving Maleficent forever. She frowned at the painful memory but the frown passed quickly and left no marks on her unwrinkled face.

With Maleficent's help, Regina had learned how to stop the tracks of time from showing on her face and body. With great calculation she had decided to stop her body from ageing when she was 35, old enough to be an adult and carry the gravitas she needed but young enough to be attractive by a society that believed that youth was the greatest cause of beauty, *fools*, how could they not know that it was power?

Regina took one last look at the sooted makeup around her eyes, her flawless light olive skin and the full, sensuous lips that were painted perfectly and decided that she was ready for the show down that was

about to take place. She smoothed down her burgundy dress with brocade details and ensured that it was adjusted to display her cleavage in the most flattering way and then walked out into the shop.

The shop consisted of a small but well-planned room where the walls were covered in wooden shelves stocked with small jars, vials, strangely shaped glass bottles and the occasional bronze box. There was a counter, which had a young man standing behind it with a fearful but obedient look in his eyes as he watched Regina Mills, proprietor of the Mills Apothecary.

The young man was called Hallam and he and his brother Howard shared the duty of manning the counter and dealing with payment. Any questions or advice that the customers needed was left to Ms Mills. Officially she was to be consulted if you wanted an herbal remedy for your arthritis or your migraine, but people from all over the realm came to her for things more potent than that. They came for her magical potions and spells, and they paid an arm and a leg for it.

Regina needed the money as she had to pay off any prying persons trying to reveal her secret and have her put out of business. The first year of the shop she had merely threatened or maimed anyone who dared challenge her but she soon realised that more stealthy methods kept her life quiet and easy. After all, she made enough gold to hand out some bribes and still be flush with money.

People would pay. They would pay for potions that heightened their senses, pay for spells that would increase their confidence, pay for minor curses that would make an adversary awake with a large wart on his or her nose and basically anything else which showed the nature of humanity. As long as it was within her powers, so no bringing back the dead or forcing people to love, she would sell it for the right price.

With an enigmatic and dangerous smile she would coax out their deepest secrets and provide them with a solution. They all left her shop happy, as long as they could pay, and some of them stayed that way. More of them did not however, as they found that using magic to solve your issues usually just meant that another larger issue would sprout

where the old one had stood, but that wasn't Regina Mills' problem and she refused to stand for anyone pretending that it was.

Her customers desired her wares and her skills but they also feared her. If magic and anyone magical was mistrusted in this realm, then the dangerously beautiful sorceress with her deadly smile and her eyes twinkling with something that could as well be malice as power, frightened the socks off people.

This would come in handy today. The middle sized village she had chosen for the home of her shop was filled with people who knew her well, as they should since most of them had been to see her on one errand or another. They also knew that her shop drew people from far away, people who might want a meal, fresh horses or even some trinkets to take home to their children and so Mills Apothecary was good for the town.

However, a brief but bloody war in their kingdom meant that there was a new Royal family and this village belonged to them. The king, who had taken the throne about four months ago, was called King Robert Foxcote. He was known to be brave and strong but what was less widely known, but by now very apparent to his subjects, was that he hated magic.

Some said that his mother had fallen in love with a sorcerer, left the family to be with him and then met a tragic fate due to a magical mishap. Other rumours said that using a magical potion had misfired for the king and left him impotent. A third rumour was that he was jealous of those being able to perform magic and wanted them all dead for that reason.

Regina didn't know which of these, if any, were true but she knew first-hand how much the new King despised magic. Rumour of her shop had reached him and he and his Royal entourage had visited her last week. She had done everything to make the shop appear as a normal apothecary with nothing stronger than St. Johns Wort and Feverfew, she had even glamoured the shelves of magical potions kept in the backroom out of view during the visit.

Sadly, King Robert wasn't fooled. The waves of power rolling off Regina and her impressive reputation belied any attempt to show herself as just a regular herbalist. He had given her one week to pack up her things and leave his kingdom. Naturally she wouldn't. This was her home and he had no proof that she was using magic. She was certain that he was merely posturing, he would be too frightened of her magic to try anything today.

There was a sound of heavy footfalls outside and Regina strode in to her shop, calmly and regally, to see a small army marching towards her door. Leading them, was King Robert. He wore a look of disdain and bloodlust and Regina suddenly realised that she had been wrong, this was not posturing.

She prepared to fight and felt the magic pulse in her blood as she looked at the army of about twenty men heading for her little shop. Her face broke out into a smile which was more of a snarl, she would *pulverise* these insolent brutes even if it meant that her cover was blown and she had to leave this village.

However, what she hadn't accounted for was the fact that when King Robert pushed through her door, nearly taking it off its hinges, he didn't come at her with his sword but instead threw a silvery powder on her.

Regina didn't know what the powder was but she knew that it did nothing to still her rage. She laughed and raised her hands to send out a shockwave of magic which would blow them all to the other side of the square but... it didn't. The magic did nothing and she felt it slowly die in her veins and settle back into the innermost parts of her. She stared confoundedly from her hands to the man in front of her and then to the leather pouch which had held the powder he threw at her.

Still staring at the pouch she hissed "what was *that*?"

"That, you delectable little abomination was *your undoing*. It's a powder I confiscated from the last horrid, old witch that I banished. Well, I say banished but what I meant was *kill with poison in her tea*.

But I did banish her corpse, just to ensure that she wouldn't get a decent burial. I had my men leave her on a dung heap outside of the borders of my kingdom. The powder renders your magic unusable for a short while, the witch did say that it was ONLY for a short while but it will be long enough for me to interrogate you and kill you."

Regina clenched her jaw and glared daggers at the man but deep inside herself a laugh was bubbling up. A laugh that was due to the fact that she was a second generation sorceress, born with magic and then trained by Maleficent, one of the greatest magic wielders of all time. That powder might render a lesser sorceress powerless for a while, but it would only work on *her* for a few moments more. She could already feel her magic stirring, she could feel it rise to the surface slowly but surely and she knew that it would soon be singing in her veins again, ready to be used.

Meanwhile, back in King Robert Foxcote's castle the Queen Desiree and her oldest son were standing by a window. The Queen was smoothing down a lock of hair that always stood straight up on her son's head.

He whined petulantly at the treatment and tried to distract her by asking "why can papa not be here for this? This was his idea after all."

The Queen finally smoothed his hair down to her satisfaction and imperially replied "because he is busy ridding our new kingdom of that scourge of a witch. Imagine the cheek of pretending to be a mere apothecary! As if an unmarried woman could ever be respectable! He will deal with her and then join us and our guests, my sweet Jacob."

Just then a footman dressed in the finest livery entered the great hall, he brought the two guests and with a bow he introduced them as King James and the Princess Emma.

The Queen smiled an entirely fake but still very gracious looking smile and said "ah, welcome to Swordsbane. We are so happy to meet the lovely Princess Emma, aren't we Jacob?"

The young Prince just nodded and suddenly Emma got a feeling that something was wrong here, and it wasn't just the idea of her marrying this boy.

A lovely day for getting out of here

Regina casually put one hand on her hip and smiled with infuriating superiority. "Oh, so you mean to *interrogate* me? Might I ask about what? How to rid yourself of certain sexual maladies perhaps? Tell me, your Majesty... does it sting when you pass water? I might have something for that."

A few of the soldiers behind the King tried to hide smiles but the King himself was anything but amused.

Stony-faced he growled "I will interrogate you about your malicious craft. I want to know how you came by your powers, how you use them and then I want to watch you slowly bleed out and die before my eyes."

"And I want a tall, cold glass of gin, all the riches in the world and a lover with unlimited stamina... that doesn't mean I'm going to get it, *dear*", Regina drawled while giving a coquette gesture of the hand.

Once again she saw a few soldiers give a twitch at the corners of their mouths and she marvelled at how badly disciplined the King kept his men. If she had an army they wouldn't even breathe without her consent, much less smile.

Her magic was still powering up in her, slowly rising from its slumber. Soon she would be able to wield it but it wouldn't be in full force. She felt conflicted, should she use her powers as soon as some of it arose and make a run for it or should she wait until she was in full control and just kill them all? Regicide might not be a great idea, the powers ruling the Enchanted Forest hated magic enough without being able to show dead Royalty to prove its danger.

No, she realised that she was better off just cutting her losses and leaving. It pained her though, losing her little shop and having to admit

a partial defeat. Still, she could always retrieve her hidden stash of magic potions and her money by magic later, when she was somewhere safe and then start over somewhere new. Somewhere better.

Lost in thoughts, it took her half a second to notice that the King was speaking.

"So, witch... what do you say? Will you make this easy or hard on yourself?" King Robert asked tersely as he walked closer to Regina.

She stood still, wishing to show that his presence didn't worry her at all. Even when he was so close that she could smell his breath, which stank of meat, she didn't show any sign of even a merest reaction. This clearly galled him and so he ran his index finger over the tops of her breasts in her cleavage and hissed "if you decide on the hard way I cannot vouch for my men's ability to keep their hands off of you."

Regina looked at him as if he had just suggested that the sky was made of icing sugar and scoffed, "do you think I would allow anyone to get closer than you just did without killing them?"

The King pointedly looked down at the leather pouch in his other hand and hissed "I don't think you would have much choice, *monster*. You are helpless, remember?"

Regina's right eyebrow arched and her exquisite mouth displayed an arrogant grin as her rich, deep voice said "*am I?*"

Then she lifted her hands and harnessed her limited magic to make the ground tremble. It shook violently and the effect got worse and worse until the vials, tins and bottles on the shelves were all falling down and crashing on the floor, sending out wafts of herbal scents that overpowered the senses. Then the shelves themselves began to move and fall as well, the ground was quaking so powerfully that cracks were showing in the flooring and finally the roof started making creaking, snapping sounds and all through it a sound pierced through

all the other noises... a melodious laughter ringing out with malice and triumph in Regina's deep, dulcet tones.

A few of the soldiers didn't wait for orders, in their deep-rooted fear of magic they just ran. The rest turned to the King who was staring at Regina with his jaw working furiously and his eyes showing equal measures of fear and fury. He brandished his sword and ran at her with it outstretched, if she hadn't give a simple flick of the wrist and vanished his sword she would have surely been run through. Now he stopped right in front of her, nearly losing his balance due to his quick stop and stared at his empty hands.

She looked incredulously at him and purred "did you really think you'd be allowed to *stick anything in me*? I told you that I don't allow that sort of behaviour. Now move aside *Sir King*, I wish to pass."

With those words she gave a gesture of her hand and he flew to the side of the shop, landing on a fallen shelf. Regina walked proudly but swiftly through the mass of soldiers who stared from her to the King, waiting for orders and wondering if they dared to stop the striking sorceress. She hoped they wouldn't try it as she felt her magic just sparking weakly under her skin now, she had used most of it and knew that she would need time before she could do any other major invocations or spells.

Meanwhile in the castle, Charming and Emma had been treated to lavender tea, diluted sweet wine and an array of cakes and candied fruits. Queen Desiree was all smiles and politeness during the small meal but Emma kept feeling that this woman wasn't just looking for a wife for her son. In fact, she seemed to be inadvertently shielding Jacob from Emma, sitting between them and speaking for her son to keep him from talking directly to Emma.

When Charming suggested that Emma and Jacob went for a small stroll in the garden to get to know each other, Emma actually saw the woman flinch. Clearly, she couldn't forbid it without seeming impossibly rude so she gave a forced smile and a nod.

It was a balmy but quite windy day and Emma felt a few strands of hair come loose from her elaborate hairdo as they sauntered through the perfectly maintained garden. The young prince by her side wasn't very talkative, in fact he seemed almost frightened by her.

For a long time Emma tried to make him feel more at ease with small talk and polite questions on how he was taking to this new kingdom and the area in general. Jacob replied politely but curtly and refused to look her in the eye.

After a while, Emma's patience ran out. She was a kind and sweet woman but she was a lot feistier than her mother or father, who both could have put up with this strange behaviour all day. Emma was simply tougher and less pliable and by now, she was tired of this strange mood and the feeling of doom lingering over the visit.

Emma stopped in the middle of a path leading towards the rose garden. She crossed her arms and stared the teenage prince straight in the eye. "Alright, why don't you tell me what is really going on here?"

"I... I don't know what you mean!"

"Yes, you do. Now I am a patient woman, but if I have to go on with this charade without finding out what your parents have planned for me I might just lose my temper. And when I lose my temper... very bad things happen. Very bad *magical* things."

Jacob's eyes grew wide as saucers and Emma could have sworn that she saw his lip tremble. He cast a glance up towards the castle where his mother was and Emma caught the gesture.

"Oh, your mama can't help you now, little prince. It's just you and me. So tell me what is really going on here and we can end this nicely", Emma announced authoritatively.

The slight and lanky boy gave his best angry glare and tried a superior scoff before saying "you're bluffing. You wouldn't dare to try any magic. You need a husband too much to offend me and my family."

Emma laughed and her simple laugh carried more weight than his calculated scoff had. "I *need* a husband about as much as I need a smack to the head and to be honest with you, even if I did admit to being in need of a husband I would hardly choose *you*."

Suddenly the spoiled Prince's temper flared and he spat "and like I would want an abomination like you for a wife? Ha! My parents only want me to marry you so my father can use you in the fight against magic!"

Emma felt her magic tingling in her hands as her heart began to pound with anger, but she kept it under control, she would not allow her rage to surface until she had found out exactly what this pompous little sliver of a man meant.

She walked towards him and without warning put one arm under his chin and pushed him towards the castle wall. "Don't struggle, *dear prince* or I'll push down on your windpipe and make sure you never breathe again. Now, start explaining or I'll let my magic out to play."

The Prince struggled a little and then whined "you're strong". Emma dipped her head in quick acknowledgement and said "practicing swordplay with your father every day will do that to a girl. I highly recommend you take up that habit too. Now, tell me how you parents planned to use me to fight magic!"

The boy paled. "Fine, I'll tell you. Mama and Papa wanted me to marry you so we could keep you here and papa's surgeons could experiment on you to find out where your magic comes from and how it can be removed. Papa knew that you couldn't control your magic so he wanted to make you trust us and then make you believe that the surgeons were there to help you get rid of your magic and make you normal."

Emma felt a sickening feeling in the pit of her stomach and fought down the queasiness. "Oh Jacob, if you and your parents think for a second that I would have let you get away with that then you don't have the first clue of who I am. Let me guess, my mother painted me

out as a sweet, caring thing that would make a lovely wife and mother in her letters? That, my boy, is just the sales pitch. I'm stubborn, strong and far too intelligent for you inbred, morally corrupt cretins."

With that Emma let him go. She might not be as sweet as her parents but she did believe in doing the right thing and hurting this spineless boy would not have been that. Emma stormed back the way she came and rushed up the many stairs and hallways until she reached the room where her father and the Queen were still drinking lavender tea and now discussing her dowry by the sounds of it.

Emma rushed into the room and saw the worried look in her father's eyes. He squinted when he worried now and the wrinkles around his eyes were growing more and more with each day.

"We're leaving", Emma panted, out of breath from her rush.

Charming quickly stood and automatically put his hand on his sheathed sword. "Emma! Are you alright? Did the Prince try something?"

Emma shook her head, sad to disappoint her father with yet another dead end on the marriage front. "Oh father, it's not him who's trying something. It's his parents. They want me to marry him so they can do experiments on me to figure out how my magic works and remove it. They see me as an abomination that they can use as a weapon against magic."

Charming believed her immediately, as he always did with his only child. However, he still turned to Queen Desiree to hear it in her words.

With anger painted all over his face he growled "is this true?"

The Queen held out her hands in a placating gesture. "Dearest King James. You must believe me when I say that none of what we wished to do would have hurt your daughter, at least not more than fleeting physical pain, she would have been alive and able to give my son

children. We merely wanted to use her unfortunate curse of magic to rid the realm of this disgusting plague once and for all. We might have been able to remove her dark powers and made her a normal human, she would have been better off. *She still can be.*"

"No she cannot. My daughter is perfect the way she is and no one is ever going to change her, experiment on her or use her in anyway as long as I'm alive. If any of you ever try I promise you more than *fleeting physical pain*. We will go home and discuss if this is cause for war or if we are just to spread the word and watch all other Royal houses shun you."

With that he walked over to Emma and extended his arm to her. She was about to say that she could walk by herself but she saw from the protective look in his eye that it was important to him to keep her close. She hid a sigh and a smile while she put her arm over his as they walked out together with determined steps.

When they were in the carriage and leaving the castle Emma watched her father stare grimly out the window. She could feel him seething and knew that it had taken all his control not to smash that entire castle to firewood. Her darling father wasn't so pliant and sweet now she thought with a swelling feeling of pride in her chest.

Still, she couldn't shake her feeling of discomfort at the horrible situation she just narrowly escaped. If Desiree and Jacob hadn't been such bad actors she might have agreed to the marriage just to save her parents the heartache of yet another missed marriage opportunity. What would have happened then? Would she have been laying on a slab with some physician digging in her head with medical instruments in a month or so? She didn't think she would have ever consented to that, but then maybe they would have somehow forced her. She couldn't help but shiver at the thought.

She joined her father in looked out the carriage's window as they passed through a village. Suddenly she saw a flash of bright light outside a shop front. Something that sudden and bright could only be

lightning or.... magic! She looked closer and saw a dark-haired woman in a burgundy dress shoot a flash of red light at a soldier, who promptly fell back and out of her way.

Emma could hear one of the soldiers scream "get her! She's rendered the King unconscious!" Emma didn't hesitate, she banged on the carriage and shouted "driver, turn the carriage around and pick up that woman in the burgundy dress."

Her father looked at her aghast. "What?"

Emma smiled and shrugged "she clearly needs a lift and you know what they say... my enemy's enemy is my friend!"

Charming looked like he was going to argue but by then they had already turned around and was right by the fleeing woman. Emma threw open the carriage door and shouted "get in" to the running woman.

Regina stopped and looked the beautiful blonde up and down before asking "why should I?"

Emma smiled disarmingly. "Because you want to get away from the insane King Robert and so do we."

Regina looked at the blonde's outstretched hand and considered her options. She could either be out here fighting an army of 20 and an angered King with only small amounts of magic left OR she could be sitting in a warm, cushy carriage heading away from all this trouble with this pretty young lady who claimed to hate the King too. Easy decision.

She gave a non-committal shrug just for show and took Emma's hand. She felt the surge of magical powers in that hand straight away and as she let the other woman pull her into the carriage she revelled in the delicious feeling of that magic. Young, wild and.... pure. Suddenly the day was looking up! But then she was seated in the carriage and came face to face with a handsome, middle aged man with a frown on his face and his hand on a very big, but still sheathed, sword.

Regina gave him a brash smile and cooed "good afternoon. Lovely day, isn't it?"

The carriage ride

Charming didn't answer Regina's facetious greeting, he merely glared at her and gave a soft grunt.

Emma chuckled. "Excuse my father, he's in a bad mood due to our encounter with the Royal family of Swordsbane. Allow me to introduce us, I am Princess Emma and this is my father King James."

Regina looked from the sceptical middle-aged man to his daughter. "Charmed, I'm sure," she said in her low but melodious voice. She gave Emma her most ravishing and sensual smile and saw both daughter and father tense, although she suspected it was for different reasons.

Regina thought back at the flare of magic she had felt as she took the hand of the beautiful Princess and added "I assume the encounter was unpleasant because King Robert's family wasn't too happy about your *quite glorious* magic?"

Emma gave her a proud smile, realising that this might be the first time someone talking about her magic had caused her to smile, and laughingly asked "how did you know?"

"Know what, dear? That they would hate you for your powers or that you have magic?" Regina asked in that same smoky, trickling tone of voice that reminded Emma of warm honey sliding over a toasted chestnut.

"The latter", Emma replied and tried to keep her voice from shifting back into the overfamiliar and almost flirtatious tone that they both seemed to have set.

"Well, for someone well-versed in magic touching another person with the gift is a... unmistakable sensation. If you will allow me to say this,

Princess, your magic doesn't just discreetly signal its presence, it shouts it from the rooftops. You could be a great talent," Regina said while remembering the feel of the younger woman's magic, that wild and pure magic that felt *delicious*.

Emma took in the predatory twinkle present in the mahogany-brown eyes meeting hers and once again had to keep herself from flirting back. After all, this woman was not only a stranger she was also as mentioned, *a woman* and to make things worse her father was awkwardly present. However, Emma had to admit that she desperately wanted to flirt back. She got so little opportunity to do that as most men were either frightened by her position in life or her magic.

So far her only real romantic entanglement had been her tutor, with whom she had a two year long romance until he had decided to seek out a wife and a more permanent life for himself. Emma still missed him, but looking at the very sensual woman in front of her she wondered if it wasn't the passion and the lust she missed? Stolen moments on the divan as they were supposedly studying history or passionate encounters in the overgrown maze at the edge of the castle grounds. His breath hot as he stood behind her fumbling with his britches and whispering that she was the most beautiful creature to ever exist as he lifted up her dress.

Suddenly Emma blushed crimson. Why was she thinking about that? Now? Here? In the same carriage as her poor, sweet father? She reproached herself and made herself answer Regina politely but steadily.

"Perhaps I could. I have never actually spoken to someone with magic before, but I have wanted to learn more about my powers and after the encounter with the Queen and Crown Prince I am even more eager to do so."

Regina pursed her lips. "Oh? Why is that?"

"They planned to use my daughter as a *weapon against all magic users*", Charming said while still glaring suspiciously at their guest.

Emma shot him a glance at the unnecessary veiled threat and show of power. She had no doubt that the dark-haired sorceress was dangerous, in fact danger seemed to pour off this woman, but Emma was convinced that *they* were not her prey.

"They wanted to surgically experiment on me, to find out how my magic worked while they kept me as a docile future Queen and brood mare for Prince Jacob", Emma said with a hint of fury in her otherwise calm voice.

Regina scrunched up her face in a look of disgust. "Oh my, well having seen that snivelling, little fawn that they call Crown Prince once I must say that you as well off not being experimented on as not having to breed with *him*."

Emma couldn't stop herself from laughing but Charming was still unmoved. With a furrowed brow, he stared at her like she was a snake that could strike at any moment and it was beginning to annoy the brunette.

Regina sighed and looked him in the eye. "Look, your Majesty. I understand why you would be feeling a bit prickly and unlikely to trust at the moment. I would be the same if those toads had tried to do that to my child, but I promise you that I mean neither of you any harm. So you can relax the death stare and in the name of trolls blood, *do take your hand off your sword hilt*."

He shook out of his vigil and decided that she was probably telling the truth. He took his hand off his sheathed sword by his side, but kept his gaze firmly placed on the sorceress. In a grave tone he said "it might be easier to trust you if we knew who you are."

Surprisingly, Regina was about to introduce herself with the false name she had used for the first ten years of her new life. She hadn't wanted her parents to find her and as she grew more famous for her magical favours and commodities she needed a pseudonym.

However, as the years moved on she realised that the situation was untenable and that her mother would find her one day and so she cast a spell over where her parents lived, leaving them without memory of her. So now she carried her own birth name and in that moment, just as she was about to accidentally give her pseudonym, she gave a quick thought to her parents. Wondering if they were still alive and if they ever felt that there was something missing from their life. She shook the thoughts away and reminded herself to give her real name.

"Regina Mills, your Majesty. I'm a woman with a long and complicated past but all you need to know is that for the last five years I have run Mills Apothecary, distributing herbal remedies for the poor and magical remedies for the rich. You might not have heard my name but I wager that most people who you socialise with have come to me for help at some point", she said while elegantly draping one leg over the other.

Charming surveyed her and replied "actually, I have heard that name. I believe Queen Ella came to see you once when Rumplestiltskin refused to help her."

Regina made a disgusted face. "Oh, don't speak to me of Rumplestiltskin. He has always been my main competitor, but what people don't understand is that I trade my wares and skills for gold. He does it for favours and for entertainment. I am a woman of enterprise he is a cruel *trickster*." Regina spat out the last word and both Charming and Emma realised that there was bad blood between her and the dangerous imp.

Regina shrugged off her disgust and turned to Charming once more. "So, is the Princess here your oldest child?"

A brief look of sadness passed over the King's face as he replied "our *only* child. There were complications at Emma's birth and my wife couldn't have any more children."

Regina leaned forward, extended her hand and placed it lightly on top of his. "I am sorry. I wish you would have come to me, I have

remedies that can quicken a still womb."

He cleared his throat but didn't move his hand away from under hers. "Yes, well. We didn't know of you and to be honest, after a few encounters with Rumplestiltskin, we didn't really trust magical solutions. In fact we thought magic might be evil... until Emma's powers emerged. Then we knew that magic could be dangerous but most certainly not evil, there is nothing evil inside Emma."

Regina hadn't been just acting to win this man's trust. She was truly sorry for his lack of more children as she herself grieved over not having had any. But she was diverted from her brief dip into empathy at his last words. She cast an appreciative glance to the stunning blonde and wondered if the Princess might like to have some *evil inside her*, perhaps a finger or maybe a tongue.

There was something about this woman, something that intrigued Regina. Was it just the tasty magic that ran through those blue-blooded veins hidden by that milky white skin? No, there was something else. There was an air of bravery, strength and power coming from this Princess. There seemed to be so much *potential* which was not being used and Regina ached to make this girl shrug off the burden of doing what others expected her to and see her spread her wings and fly. But yes, she also wanted to push the blonde against a wall and have her way with her, there was no disguising that.

Just like that Regina had made up her mind, she wanted to get to know this Princess further.

"Will you both excuse my impertinence if I suggest a course of action here?" Regina asked as she sat back more comfortably.

Emma was the first to speak, glad that they were talking again and that the gorgeous brunette wasn't just silently looking at her with those enigmatic dark eyes.

"Go ahead. Let's hear your suggestion," she said, intrigued.

Regina smiled at her but directed her words, together with her gaze, at the King. "May I suggest that I accompany you to your castle and give your daughter some magic lessons? For only a small fee and board as I currently need a place to stay. That way she could harness her powers, ensuring that she doesn't have any magic accidents and that she can use her powers to defend herself in the future?"

Charming looked intrigued but unsure. "Like you did back there in the square, you mean?"

Regina grimaced as she felt her pride take a serious blow. "What happened back there wasn't normal. He had a powder with which he rendered me almost powerless. If it wasn't for that, I could have fought off the entire village without wetting my brow. Let me come home with you both and I can prove it. As my shop is no longer an option, I do need a short break to regroup and I am sure that your castle has lovely soft beds for that. Let me stay for a few days and if King Robert attacks... well, my powers are almost returned to full strength. I could wipe his entire bloodline out of existence in a heartbeat."

She saw Charming and Emma both frown at her last words and reminded herself that these people seemed to have a strong moral code and soft hearts. She hastened to add "not that I would, of course. I'm sure you would prefer a less bloody solution and I am certain that together we could find one. My point here is that I am very powerful and that I frighten your enemy. Not a bad person to keep around, hmm?"

Emma looked at her father and tried to speak calmly, as if she didn't madly relish the idea of learning to control her magic and to spend more time with this charismatic creature. "Father, I think it is a sound idea. The way things are going, I really do need to learn to master my powers."

Charming looked unsure and Emma knew that he wished that his wife was there. Sometimes her parents were like two parts of the same person and therefore very reluctant to make decisions without one another.

"Come now, father. Where is the harm? If Mother doesn't approve we can just ask Lady Mills to leave with our apologies." Emma looked at Regina to get confirmation of her last words and Regina nodded and held out her hands in a gesture that said *of course*.

Charming looked at Emma and thought of how capable, clever and level-headed his daughter was. He trusted her completely and so he decided to let her have her way, after all, his darling girl was so lonely and even dubious company, like the woman opposite them, would offer some companionship and distraction. And yes, he did want her to learn to harness her powers, if for no other reason than for protection. He didn't want to have to worry about people like Queen Desiree and King Robert getting their claws into Emma.

"If you wish, my sweet. But, as you say, if your mother doesn't agree we will have to find another solution," he finally agreed while patting her gloved hand gently.

She beamed at him and chirped "of course!"

Then she turned to Regina and gave her a smile which was just as ecstatic but had just a flicker of *something more* to it and said "well, Lady Mills. It would seem that we are taking you home with us!"

Regina ignore the title of *lady*, which she wasn't sure was appropriate despite her parents former high standing, and she also ignored the fact that Emma made it sound like she was a half-drowned puppy that they had decided to save. She ignored pretty much anything but the two main things, firstly that she was once again getting what she wanted and secondly, that the green eyes fixed on hers shone with badly concealed attraction.

Meeting Snow

As they continued their trip back they mostly sat in silence. Soon the lulling movement of the carriage and the warm sun beaming down on it made Charming close his eyes and sink back in his seat. As soon as he had, Regina looked at Emma and gave her a mischievous smile that made Emma tingle all the way down to her toes.

Then the brunette closed her eyes, quietly murmured a few words and held out her hands. Soon a large brown satchel appeared out of nowhere. Emma gave a girlish gasp and immediately tried to cover it with a cough. She failed and Regina smirked knowingly at her and winked.

She opened the satchel and revealed an assortment of bottles, tins and jars, many of them with glowing or pulsing contents. Emma craned her neck and could see that the bottom of the sizable satchel seemed to be glittering in the sunlight peering in from the carriage's window. When Regina caught her looking at it she moved some of her stash of magic potions and cures to the side to reveal the bottom of the satchel being filled with gold and silver coins.

Emma's eyes widened. While her family had always had money, she couldn't remember seeing so much of it collected in one place. Regina smiled at her and whispered "I might not have my shop anymore but I have what matters, my jars of magical herbs and trinkets and the bottles of magical potions, of course. But more importantly, the lion share of five years of making deals with the rich. I do also have a little stash of money hidden somewhere else, but this bundle here, should set me up for life."

"You're very enterprising, Lady Mills", Emma said with a shyly flirtatious smile. She felt that she could allow herself a little bit of forbidden fun now that her father seemed to be sleeping.

"Oh please... call me Regina. If I am going to be tutoring you in the art of magic we will need to be less formal", the brunette said and echoed Emma's flirtatious smile but to a much higher degree, making it almost erotic.

All too soon they were arriving at the castle. As they passed through the large gates Emma asked "why didn't you bring any clothes when you summoned your belongings?"

"Oh, I can create anything I need with magic until I set myself up with a new wardrobe, I prefer to start afresh when a new chapter of my life begins. Don't worry, Princess... I won't be teaching you while in the nude if that was what you were worrying about", Regina said with a raised eyebrow and a salacious smirk. Both features vanished the second they stopped and Charming began to wake up. When he looked at his daughter and her new tutor both of them showed nothing but gladness of having finally arrived.

Charming stepped out of the carriage first and was met by his wife throwing her arms around his neck and embracing him tightly. Emma sighed but looked at them lovingly, they were always like this, whether they had been apart for a month or like now, merely a day. It was cute but there were moments when it made Emma want to roll her eyes.

She stepped out after her father and heard him fill her mother in on all that had happened. Snow White gasped in horror and then growled "if they try to get anywhere near my daughter again I will put an arrow through their chest!"

Now it was Emma's turn to get a hug from her mother. After the embrace, Snow stood back and brushed imaginary dust off Emma's dress and did a check to see that her grown up child was unscathed.

"Calm yourself, mother. No one is going to hurt me. In fact, I have taken steps to make sure I can protect myself against this sort of thing in the future. We found a tutor to teach me how to use and control my magic! Regina, this is my mother, Queen Snow."

As Regina stepped out of the carriage she heard Emma's last words and froze. Snow did the same, she stood with her hand on Emma's shoulder but her mind far away. Far away in the memory of being terrified on a runaway horse some decades ago and being saved by a young woman.

"But you... you disappeared!" Queen Snow said to the woman who looked far too young to be the Regina she had known, that woman would be about 7-8 years older than herself... and yet, that unforgettable face and that long brownish-black hair... it had to be her.

Regina felt something she hadn't felt in a long time, dread. She had put her past behind her and buried it so neatly and now here it was in the form of a middle-aged woman with skin as white as snow, raven-black hair and lips as red as blood. Snow White.

The two women stared at each other and Charming and Emma looked at each other in shared confusion. It was Charming who spoke first. Putting his hand on his wife's upper arm he asked "Snow, is everything alright?"

But it was Regina who answered. "Yes, your Majesty. Everything is fine, this has just turned into a reunion of sorts. I once knew your wife, I saved her life and I was engaged to her father for a short while, before I... ran away."

Suddenly freed from her shock, Snow ran forwards and grabbed Regina's shoulders. "Why did you leave? I wanted us to be a family!"

"I... I was in love with a young man. I escaped with him so that my mother wouldn't force me to marry your father. I'm sorry I couldn't tell you, Snow. It was all so sudden and anyway, you were so young, I could hardly explain it to you nor expect you to keep the secret. But I did care for you, you should know that."

Snow sniffed and Regina could see tears in the younger woman's eyes. Regina knew it was just a matter of time until it happened... and then

it did, Snow pulled her into a huge bear hug. With a grimace Regina allowed herself to be hugged until her ribs almost cracked.

Reluctantly Regina patted Snow's back. She wished she could convey to the woman holding her that she wasn't the same anymore, she wasn't the strong-willed but sweet girl who had saved her. She was a woman who had lost her one true love and spent her life living in hiding and strife. She had done dark deeds to survive and even darker deeds to further her own magic, Maleficent had been a good teacher but they had always brought out the darkness in each other and there were villages burnt to cinder to show for it. Regina lived for magic, power, sex and gold, she was not someone that should be welcomed with this much love.

Snow gave a sobbing little laugh and released Regina. "There are so many things I want to ask you, but the most important one is... how do you still look so young?!"

Regina gave a detached laugh. "Magic, my dear. Together with Rumplestiltskin and Maleficent I am one of the three most powerful magicians in this realm. Stopping time from ravaging my face and body was child's play," she drawled arrogantly.

Then she looked away from Snow and stared up at the castle, evaluating it and avoiding Snow's stifling affection.

Snow looked at her. There was an air of darkness and cruelty around Regina now and Snow wondered what had happened to the woman once destined to be her stepmother. As Regina declined Charming's offer to carry her satchel Snow pondered that even Regina's voice sounded different, lower and more guttural and much more... carnal. But still, it was *Regina*, the woman Snow had admired so much so long ago. And she was here to teach her daughter, what could be better?

She looked at her lovely daughter and that was when she caught it. That look. That all too obvious look in her daughter's eye which Snow hadn't seen since Emma was 18 and deeply enamoured with her tutor.

Emma had always thought that her parents didn't know, but Snow had seen how her girl had looked at that man as if he was a delicious meal and she was starving.

Bizarrely, Emma now seemed to be looking at Regina in the same way and it startled Snow. In a way it made sense, Regina had always been extraordinarily beautiful and interesting and Snow did realise that she herself might have sprouted a girlish crush on the charismatic older woman. But Regina was so much older than Emma, she wasn't really of noble heritage, seemed to have developed an ill-omened air and most of all.... *She was a woman*. The kingdom needed Emma to be looking in that way at a Prince who could give her children. Not at Regina. Snow shook her head and looked away from her smitten daughter, desperately convincing herself that she was imagining things.

As if from far away, Snow heard the conversation that was going on around her. She heard Emma say "... and after that, we rescued Regina from the onslaught of King Robert's army." There was a playful and maybe even challenging tone in Emma's voice, as if she already knew Regina well enough to know that this would annoy her. It did annoy her.

Regina scoffed and snapped "you did nothing of the sort, I could have handled them all just fine. You two just wanted some entertainment for the long trip back, typical spoiled royalty!"

Both Charming and Emma laughed and Regina gave a proud smile at their merriment, a heartfelt smile which Snow remembered. Maybe there was something left of *her Regina* in there. Maybe she had imagined Regina's change, after all, they had just met. Snow relaxed a bit and cheerfully said "let's go inside and have some refreshments. Then Regina can make herself at home in one of the guest rooms and we three can discuss what to do about King Robert and Queen Desiree."

It was an hour later and the sun was low in the sky. Regina was now standing in a powder blue room with oil paintings of various small birds adorning the walls. She scowled at them and at the frilly details of the bedlinen and cushions. She rolled her eyes and missed the rooms she had kept above the shop, they had looked much like every make-shift home she had since she left Maleficent's and finally had started having her own home.

The rooms had been draped in black silk and with murals of black trees on a white background on every wall, and in the middle of the large bedroom stood a four poster bed lavished in wine-red velvet. Shelves and tables with books on everything from maps of the realm to the everyday use of magic, large decanters filled with exotic liquors and always a bowl or large red, crisp apples.

Regina looked to her satchel and gave a wave with her hand, a tiny bronze tin came floating out towards her. It landed in her outstretched hand, she opened it and saw a dozen little apple pips, magically preserved and ready to be planted when she found her new home. Wherever Regina lived, a new version of her apple tree would grow. She looked around the hideous room and wondered if she would stay here long enough to plant one here. Suddenly she felt cold and put her arms around herself for warmth and comfort. It was long overdue for her to find a real home.

The war council and the first lesson

Chapter Notes

Author's note: I just wanted to say thank you for reading this story and as always I am very grateful for your reviews and comments. If you want to discuss the story further (or just say hello) you can find me on Tumblr as violetscentedwriter , on Facebook where I'm called Violet Scented or on Twitter where I'm VioletscentedSQ .

A war council was called despite the late hour. Around the table were various people who had advised Charming and Snow throughout their lives as well as the commander of their Royal guards and his second in command, who usually lead the army in attacks against other kingdoms. King James opened the council by thanking them all for coming, filling them in on the devious plan against Emma and finally suggesting that they go to war with Swordsbane.

The first to reply was Red. She was a beautiful woman a few years younger than Snow and Charming and had both children and a new-born grandson. Most people would have thought her an unusual choice for a war council, but then most people hadn't seen her rip out the throats of quite a few of her friends enemies while in the shape of a large black wolf.

She sat up straight and said "I see why you wish to call for war, Charming. I would feel the same if they had threatened to do that to my child. However, their army outnumbers yours greatly and they have much more experience of war. At this point, is it worth the inevitable slaughter of your people?"

Emma nodded and added "not to mention that they didn't even manage to get anywhere with their plan. You were there father, you know that I saw right through it before they came close to me. I refuse to let people die on my behalf when nothing even happened!"

Charming only grunted in reply. He looked to the commander of the Royal guards and the army. "What about getting reinforcements?"

The grizzled man stroked his beard with one hand, making a rasping noise which cut through the silence of the room, and scowled. "I wish I could say that was an option, my liege, but most of your allies are busy fighting their own wars right now."

Snow dipped her head in understanding. "I don't think we have any *good* options here so we have to make do with the only sensible one available to us, let them off with a warning. I want nothing more than to make King Robert and Queen Desiree pay for what they were planning to do, but at this stage we have to give them another chance at peaceful coexistence."

There were noises of discontent and even one or two shocked gasps around the table. Snow White furrowed her brow and clenched her eyes shut, making the crow's feet by them more visible, before continuing in a reluctant voice, "I suggest we send them a letter with a warning that if they come anywhere near Emma or anyone in our kingdom, we will declare war. Let them know that if they so much as blink in a way we don't like, we will attack."

"Snow! That's not enough," Charming roared and banged his fist on the table.

The Queen stared at her husband and he dutifully calmed his tone and sat down, only when he had did she reply to him. "I know. I don't like it any more than you do, my love. However, I think we have to make do with that *for now*. I feel certain that Swordsbane will make another move and then we will have had some time to try and find an ally who has troops they can afford to send our way."

"But... surely we have to make sure that they don't try and do this to someone else," Charming said despondently as he looked around at the people around the table.

"Who would they go for? There aren't many magic princesses around," Red said kindly. "They will either give up their cruel plan or they'll come to claim Emma. If they do attempt to get their hands on her again, I can guarantee you that I will be there to introduce them to my fangs and claws."

Charming looked frustrated but had to admit that this was their only sensible course of action right now. "Fine, we'll do that," he muttered.

Snow nodded and smiled faintly at him and directed her next words to her personal scribe and advisor. He was a dwarf named Doc who had known Snow White since the day she got lost in the woods as a teenager, that day she had befriended seven dwarfs with seven very different personalities and talents and they had been her closest companions ever since.

"Doc, please write the letter with the warning and bring it to me and Charming to sign before the sun rises tomorrow. I wish to send it with one of my ravens as early as we can."

"Of course, my Queen. I'll start it straight away," Doc said as he slid off his chair and bowed to her and Charming.

"Good, we will reconvene if there are any further developments," Snow said as a finishing statement and rose to leave with Charming just half a step behind her.

Emma left the room in the company of Red, who was not only her godmother but often her confidant in matters she couldn't broach with her parents. Red put her arm around the younger woman's shoulders and said "so, I hear you are taking lessons in magic?"

"Not yet, I start tomorrow," Emma beamed at her.

"Well now, that is impressive. Get your instructor to teach you to turn into a wolf. That way you can come out for a moonlit run with me and my children," Red said and gave Emma's shoulder a squeeze.

Emma gave an incredulous scoff. "Not unless you promise it will be just you and your daughters, last time that son of yours met me in wolf shape he tried to hump my leg!"

Red held up her hands. "Now, you know very well that Tim was an adolescent back then. He's got a wife and son now and so his leg-humping days are over."

Emma laughed. "Glad to hear it! I'll consider it, but to be honest I don't think I'll be learning anything that advanced for quite a while."

As they walked out Emma chewed her cheek and wondered just exactly what she would be learning and what kind of instructor Regina would prove to be.

It was the next morning and the first day of Emma's magic lessons. The room they were sitting in hadn't been used since Emma finished her instruction in history, heraldry, writing and reading about five years ago. Reading was what she was using the room for right now, but under different circumstances than when she was younger. The book on the desk in front of her was one that Regina had summoned by magic from her stash of books in her old home. She had summoned all the books pertaining magic, just in case King Robert decided to burn her old rooms.

The books now stood on a bookshelf behind where Emma sat and with their blacker-than-midnight leather bindings, silver adornments and strange markings on the spine and cover they didn't look like any of the books in the castle's library. The book in front of Emma now was a book teaching half-elvish, which was the language of magic and therefore filled the books on the shelf behind her. Regina had decided

that they would start by teaching her that and then move on to roots for incantations and after that minor transporting spells and then a million other things that Emma couldn't remember.

Emma was troubled by all of this. She had always been better at handling her father's longsword and hunting deer than she was at the princess-ly skills such as needlepoint and reading. However, she wanted to impress Regina and she had a feeling that she needed to show her willingness to learn this craft from the bottom and up.

Therefore she was focusing hard, or at least she was trying to. Burying your face in an old book was difficult when over by the window stood the most alluring creature you had ever seen. Regina was pacing right now and her right hand toyed with a blood-red ruby hung around her elegant neck.

As she watched the older woman pace, Emma reflected on how different everything about Regina was. The sorceress glided effortlessly, as if she willed the air around her and the ground beneath her to do her bidding instead of having to move her own body. She was so otherworldly and yet so present in the room, her limbs were thin and lithe and yet she gave off an aura of such power and strength. Regina seemed to command everything around her to take note of her and to respond to her presence, whether that response was positive or negative didn't seem to matter.

Emma wondered if a life of magic could make her have that presence too but she somehow doubted it. She was aware of her own beauty of course, she had hardly ever met a man who hadn't remarked upon it, but she knew that it was just that – beauty. She felt she lacked Regina's magnetism.

The thought about how many lovers Regina might have had entered her mind and she thought back to her own chaste life, her tutor had contained his love for her until her 18th birthday and after that he had been her constant lover until she was twenty. However, he then left and ended not just her instruction but also her erotic adventures.

Since then, there had been plenty of young noble men coming to the castle wanting to see the unmarried beauty who was nearing the age where she could be referred to as a dried up maid. They had come for her beauty, her position as next in line for the throne and because they wanted a challenge. Some young men would dive off cliffs into unknown waters for a thrill, others would hunt for dragons and these young bucks had decided on trying to tame the beautiful princess with the dangerous magic. She saw them spur each other on and imagined them talking about her as if she was some kind of exotic beast to fell. They had disgusted her and she spurned them, even on nights when she had desperately wanted an embrace to go to.

These young noblemen were all hoping that her parents would give up searching for a Royal husband for Emma and settle for them. What they didn't know was that Emma's parents weren't against that idea at all. They had met at a ball when Prince James was engaged to King Midas's daughter and fallen in love. War had nearly broken out over their decision to marry each other and James had been shunned by his father, leaving him and Snow to rule *her* kingdom only.

So, Charming and Snow had married for love and they hoped Emma would too. That was why they refused to marry her off to some widowed king twice her age. They took Emma with them to meet any new suitor and always told her that the decision was hers. But Emma hadn't found true love and she hadn't found a string of suitable lovers either. Even though she didn't know anything about Regina's intimate life, she still felt like she was a pathetic virgin when in the same room as the sensual brunette. She needed to know more about Regina but didn't know where to begin or how to ask.

Regina felt herself being watched. She was going to reproach the blonde and make her get back to her book before they practised the intricate words together, but she wanted to enjoy this feeling a little longer. She had often felt the sensation of someone's eyes undressing her or minutely surveying her, but with Emma it was different.

It was like Emma's clever seagreen eyes weren't just trying to see underneath her clothes but further in, past the skin, the muscles and

sinews and deep, deep inside Regina where she assumed her soul must be. Emma's gaze was equal amounts of caressing her body and trying to probe her heart. It was the kind of curious admiration that could make a person feel invincible and it made Regina feel like her blood was pulsing harder, hotter and with youthful vigour. Something that only strong magic or good sex could do these days.

After a while she had indulged them both long enough and without looking at Emma she snapped "eyes in the book, Princess."

Sighing, Emma obeyed and continued reading about how this strange language worked and how it translated into English. She was glad that she would only need to know enough to read spells in it and not have to carry out long conversations.

Regina looked back out of the window. She could see Snow walking in the herb garden below and she wondered if she should ask her for permission on rearranging her room or just go ahead and do it. Regina was cautious of feeling like she was answering to someone else. She had spent far too many years loving Maleficent and feeling like she had to answer to her older lover and mentor for anything she wanted. It had pained her to feel that way and she most certainly would not allow herself to experience that again. Regina Mills set her own path and if someone didn't like that, they could have the pleasure of watching her as she walked away from them. She decided that she would just redress the room and see what her new host's reaction would be.

There was a quiet sigh and Regina turned to see Emma frowning over the strange words lined up in her book. Regina smirked as she placed her hands on her hips to smother the impulse to go over there and caress the furrowed forehead of her lovely student. Soon she would have to introduce the blonde to the system of rewards and punishments that Maleficent had taught her with. Nothing gave motivation like a kiss from a coveted instructor.

The apple

Chapter Notes

Author's note: A special thank you to Irene (Misslane) for her incredible art and encouragement... it makes writing even more fun. (I'd also like to thank her wife Elia for her kind comments and for making me a Ponycorn cake one day!)

This was their fourth magic lesson and Emma had almost gotten the hang of half-elvish. Almost being the imperative word, and that wasn't good enough in Regina's mind.

As Emma mispronounced the word for *summon* three times in a row Regina crossed her arms over her chest and scowled at her pupil. "I just don't think you are putting in enough effort, Princess"

Emma felt her jaw clench at the unfair comment. "Excuse me? I am doing everything to learn this ludicrous language! It's not my fault that my mind prefers... doing things rather.... than studying things."

Regina quirked an eyebrow and scoffed softly. "Oh my, how eloquently put, dear. Clearly very accurate though."

Emma stood up, toppling her chair to the ground as she did. "That's it! I've had enough of this. All we have done here is words, words and words. I'm losing my mind to boredom and your haughty, rude and quite frankly *relentless* comments don't help!"

Regina looked at her curiously with slightly squinting eyes and Emma felt her heart pound as her brain played out the two likely scenarios

here. Either she was about to be harshly told off or the even worse scenario of Regina just walking out and never coming back would occur. Because let's face it, the brunette standing in front of her in a black, laced dress which showed as much cleavage as it oozed power would not be spoken to like that.

Regina pursed her lips and kept her scrutinizing gaze fastened on Emma while she considered her options here. She could punish Emma, but then this was a Princess and they didn't know each other well enough to ensure that the blonde would not go running to her parents to tell all. The last thing Regina needed right now was more Royals baying for her blood, it was a nuisance and should be avoided if possible. Alternatively, she could reproach Emma and threaten to leave. Naturally she wouldn't *actually leave*, she knew just how hard she had worked Emma and that this was not work that came naturally to the blonde – of course the spoiled Princess was going to cause a fuss at this point. That was nothing to leave over.

However, as she saw the worried look in the green eyes meeting hers, she decided on another course. She laughed.

Emma stared at her, feeling even dumber than she had before because now she worried that she must have missed something vital.

"Now, aren't you a feisty thing, Princess! I like that in a woman. Perhaps I should give you a break from theory and let try some actual magic, get your... *hands dirty*," Regina said with an amused grin.

Emma slowly opened and closed her fists unconsciously while she searched for words. She had been so certain that everything was going to go wrong after that comment and had no means to deal with her suddenly cheerful and apparently pleased tutor.

"I... I... uh would be very grateful for that, Lady Mills."

Regina tut-tutted at her and Emma stuttered "I-I mean Regina."

It annoyed Emma greatly that she seemed to be reduced from a grown woman and heir to the throne to a bumbling child in front of this woman, but it interested her as well. A lifetime of no one ever standing up to her and now... she was almost quaking in her elegant shoes at the thought of angering this woman. It was... challenging.

Regina tilted her head, still grinning, and asked "so... are you ready to create some magic, Princess?"

Emma licked her lips nervously and nodded.

Regina's smile disappeared and was replaced by a look of focus and calm discipline. "Good. We will start with something simple. Now, magic is controlled not only by your skills but also by your emotions, they... fuel the magic, so to speak. So if you find it easier to access your magic via your strong negative feelings, like I do, then you will be using dark magic. If you find it easier to tap into your powers by focusing on positive feelings then your magic will be light. Do you follow?"

"I think so," Emma said tentatively.

"I'll show you. I am going to conjure something and I'll tell you what I am thinking and feeling as I do it. Alright?"

"Yes, please," Emma said as she tried to make herself take in everything that was about to happen.

Regina turned and walked closer to Emma and the blonde had yet another chance to wonder if it was the brunette's extremely high-heeled shoes or the heavy dress that made her sway the way she did. Then she saw how Regina's hips moved and she quickly decided that the brunette was actually moving like that intentionally. Not very ladylike of course, but very... striking.

Regina held out her hands and breathed in deeply through her nose. Emma had seen her do magic before and knew that all this preparation

was just for her benefit, like a slowing down of a procedure so that a novice could catch all the nuances and steps.

"Now, I try to channel my rage, my sadness or my sense of injustice in this dirty, rotten world towards achieving my goal. So I think of the emotion, let's try for *pent up anger* today as I seem to have some to spare, and I think of what it is I want to create here in my hands."

In the blink of an eye a large and unnaturally shiny, red apple appeared in Regina's palms. Regina opened her eyes and locked gaze with Emma to ensure she had her attention. "What I did after I had my emotion in focus was briefly think about the apple. Now, if it had been the first time I conjured an apple I would have thought about what an apple is. Where does it come from? How does it look? What will it taste like? What effects will it have on me if I eat it? It would have been a lengthier process than this was."

Regina looked the apple over as she continued. "A lot of that is done unconsciously, which is why creating something our mind knows is real will always be easier than creating something we made up. For example, my mind and my mouth knows what an apple should taste like. So when I think *apple* my mind will fill in the blanks. However, if I tried to create an apple that taste like treacle or had the texture of a mushroom, my mind would struggle and the finished product would be a disaster. This is why if you wanted something more advanced, like say, a poisoned apple, I would recommend you create an apple and buy some poison to add to it. Buy it from me, I'd give you a discount."

Emma had to give a brief laugh at the saleswoman smile that suddenly appeared on Regina's face.

"Oh, but I'm sure you wouldn't sell *poison* to just anyone. Imagine who they might hurt," Emma said with a smile.

Regina studied that smile. Was Emma being serious or was she jesting? Did she know that Regina had sold endless numbers of dangerous potions to anyone willing to pay, callous murderer or desperate lover alike? If she knew, would she be outraged or would she

see the allure of darker ways? Just how deep did the moral fibre run in this fair Princess?

"Is something wrong?" Emma queried at Regina's silence.

"No, Princess. Nothing is wrong. I was just wondering if you are ready for conjuring things. Perhaps learning to move items would be easier. Hold out your hands, emote and focus on the apple in my hands", Regina instructed seriously.

Emma change her stance and straightened up and then held her hands out. "Alright, I'm thinking about the apple."

"Yes, but did you tap into your magic? Did you use your emotions?"

"No, I... didn't know which one to use," Emma admitted and tried to keep herself from looking as insecure and stupid as she felt.

Regina saw the slight blush creeping into the proud woman's cheeks and ignored it out of respect.

"Fine. Let's see what strong emotions you can access easily. You were annoyed when I pushed you about your lack of progress in half-elvish. How about that annoyance?"

"Um, no. No, I don't think that would accomplish anything. I was only annoyed for a brief moment, I don't really carry grudges. I get angry and then I do something stupid and then the feeling dissipates," Emma admitted with an embarrassed shrug.

Regina gave a low, melodious laugh but it was a kind laugh and Emma couldn't take offence.

"Alright. What emotions are you experiencing right now, or more to the point, what emotions are always lurking in the core of your heart?"

Emma knitted her brow and pondered this for a while. "Well, insecurity I suppose. Fear of failure. A wish to please, perhaps?" The

last words were a little too honest and they made Emma's cheeks redden even more than they had before.

"Hmm, I doubt any of those would be strong enough for magic, they lack constancy. You don't strike me as an insecure person, nor fearful but maybe... you're eager to please. I of course don't mean anything sexual by that, just that you wish to make people happy. To bring them the happiness you feel that they deserve?"

Emma looked at a point just behind Regina as she considered this. "Yes, maybe you are right about that," she mumbled in a surprised tone.

Regina took a grip on the apple in her palms and used it to gesture towards Emma. "Well *that*, my dear, would stem from love. You love people and you want them to love you back. Now, I based that observation on having seen you with your parents. You loved them enough to even agree to marry that snivelling little rake, Prince Jacob, just to give them ease of mind. That is strong love, indeed. We'll use that. Either focus on a love-filled memory containing your parents OR on how proud and relieved your parents will be when you have control over your magic."

Emma opted for the latter and focused on the look on her mother's face when she showed her what her magic could do. Making her father proud was never hard, but her mother, while always *basically* proud of her, was only really blown away when Emma had learned something new and useful.

After a short while, Regina saw white light sparking at Emma's fingertips and hummed her approval. "Good, you've tapped into your magic. Now, focus on the apple and imagine it moving to your hands."

Emma tried. She could feel the magic flowing through her, just like it had every time her magic had accidentally risen and misfired horribly. But now she felt safe, she felt safe because she was sure that if she lost control of this strange power, Regina would somehow contain it or at least limit the damage.

She imagined the apple moving from Regina's palm to her own outstretched hands. Suddenly she felt a weight in her hands and was about to give a little jump for joy until she felt that whatever was in her hands was wet and gooey. She opened her eyes and stared at what was basically a pile of mashed apple dripping from the gaps between her fingers.

Regina laughed and this laugh wasn't particularly kind. Emma glared at her as she heard the mashed apple make dripping sounds as it splashed on the floor.

Regina collected herself and bit her lip to keep from giving Emma a stinging comment. She cleared her throat and cooed "so, how about we try that again but this time you try to focus on keeping the apple in one piece, hmm?"

Emma sighed dejectedly and looked at the dripping mess on her hands.

"Don't lose your confidence, Princess. Most magic users couldn't have achieved even that at this early stage. You have promise, you just need the discipline", Regina added.

Emma was still looking like the world had ended and Regina realised that now would be a good time to use Maleficent's method of the carrot and the whip. It was a little early for the carrot to be *a kiss*, though. But maybe something along those lines? She grinned to herself and sashayed the three steps that separated her from Emma.

When she was right in front of Emma's outstretched hands she bent down and licked a long line of the apple sauce off Emma's ring finger and down to the heel of her palm.

Emma gave a loud gasp and for a brief second Regina thought she had overstepped her mark and was about to be asked to leave. When she looked up to check Emma's expression she saw nothing but surprise and a sparkling, lustful smile.

Regina gave a low, dirty chuckle and purred "now Princess. Let us try that again and this time I want you to keep the apple intact."

Then she waved her hand and Emma's palms, digits and even the floor were clean again, as if the smashed apple had never existed. Soon another perfect, shiny red apple appeared in Regina's hands and the brunette's expression changed from flirty encouragement to severe focus. Emma arranged her own features accordingly.

The blonde closed her eyes and focused on the future pride and love on her mother's face and then when the magic began to flow, on the apple. She was focusing more deliberately now, thinking about the shape and texture of the apple and then after a painfully long time... there was a weight in her cupped palms. She opened her eyes and saw the apple sitting in her hands as if it had been there all the time.

She gave a small yelp of joy and began to examine the apple to make sure it wasn't hollow or about to explode.

Regina laughed at her inspecting the apple from every angle and said "I'm sure it's perfect. After all, I created it and you managed to levitate it over in one piece. Go on, take a bite out of it. I can promise you that my fruit always tastes exquisite as it is *dripping with sweet juices*."

Emma gave her a disapproving look at the obvious and vulgar double entendre but took a bite out of the apple anyway. It was incredibly crisp, sweet and as Regina promised, very juicy. Emma made a concerted effort to not let the juice drip over her lips as she feared what the sexually charged woman opposite her would say at that.

"It's very nice", she offered casually.

Regina scoffed and drawled, "as you wish, pretend that it is not the best apple you have ever tasted. Now, I think that is enough lesson for today. I know you promised to spar with your father this afternoon."

Emma swallowed the bite of apple and started to get ready to leave. As she walked away she said "you should come watch us spar. My father

might be the expert at swordplay but I am not far behind him in skill."

Regina scrunched up her nose and went to close the book Emma had been reading from at the start of the lesson. "Oh, swords rather bore me. I'll give it a miss and focus on rearranging my room I think. Your parents won't mind if I make myself at home, I hope?"

"No, go right ahead," Emma shrugged unconcerned.

"Good. Then I will see you at the same time tomorrow when we WILL return to the books before we practice any more magic."

Emma sighed but nodded her agreement as she headed for the door. Just as she had opened the door to leave, the sound of Regina's voice made her turn around.

"Oh, and Princess, *congratulations*. You seem to bring out a peculiar patience in me. Most other pupils as demanding and infuriating as you... I would have turned into a toad."

"Maybe you just like me in this form too much?" Emma said with confidence she could have sworn hadn't been there five minutes ago and took another bite of her apple before closing the door behind her.

The raven and the room

The raven's black wings glimmered in the pale morning light. Despite the arrival of spring it was a chilly and windy morning and the raven had to counteract the high winds as it flew. Below it the landscape unfurled, showing forests and lakes that looked majestic despite appearing so small from this height.

Soon the raven saw the castle that lay in the middle of the kingdom that humans called Swordsbane. As it approached the elegant but stark castle it began to fly in circles, finding the perfect spot to land. Soon it did and it settled in an open window, carefully manoeuvring around the stain-glassed pane that had been opened to allow some morning air into the stuffy room.

The raven began to groom its feathers, seemingly ignoring the two people inside the room. The two people who were Queen Desiree and King Robert. The Queen was upset and paced back and forth in front of her husband.

"Robert, there must be a solution to this!"

"Yes, my love. Perhaps we should let Jacob try and find it as it is his fault that we couldn't carry out our very simple and convenient plan. If he had managed to keep his mouth shut we would have had that little blonde bitch of a sorceress here with us now", Robert spat.

"Yes, yes! I know", Desiree stopped pacing and began rubbing her temples instead before continuing "he was *weak*. We have spoiled him too much, we need to make him stronger... if it is not too late for that. But in his defence, the conniving wench was cleverer than expected. He can't be completely blamed for her sensing something was wrong, for all we know she might have used her magic."

Robert slapped his hand onto a nearby table and growled "nonsense, that girl doesn't know how to use her magic! It only explodes out of her and causes mayhem. She belongs here where we can determine where this magic comes from and how it works. She will have a better life if she is controlled and we are the people to do it."

Desiree stared at her husband and swallowed the words *how can we do that if we can't even control our son?* Instead she nodded slowly as if thinking over his words.

"Yes, I think that is the only solution. We need to get that girl back here and we need to wed her to our son. Then she will be ours and we can finally get both the key to unlocking the secrets of magic and an heir. She is fertile, is she not?" Desiree asked, suddenly worried.

Robert waved his hand dismissively. "Oh, I would think so. She seems fit and fruitful enough and if she can't conceive... well she can always be made to have an accident or go wandering in the night and disappear. Then Jacob can sow his seed in his next wife."

"Good. I want her back here, Robert. It has become a matter of pride," the Queen hissed determinedly.

"I know. We will bide our time and consider our options. Perhaps soon Emma will have another magical accident and her parents will beg us to take her off their hands and fix her. Or maybe we should just attack and take her, we have a vast army and it might just be feasible to have a full out war without emptying the kingdom's coffers."

"Alright. We will wait and we will see what comes to pass, there will be an opening for us to use and then we will strike. After all, we are nothing if not patient," Desiree purred as she smiled at her husband and placed her slightly wrinkled hand on his broad chest.

He smiled back and placed his large hand around her thin waist to pull her closer to him. "Patient? I would say *tenacious*."

She gave a cruel, tinkling laugh and smirked at him. "Yes, and some would say *stubborn and wicked*. I'm going to stick with patient."

He laughed too and pulled her closer to crash their mouths together in a rough but passionate kiss.

The raven in the window cawed loudly and took flight. Once again battling the winds it flew in the direction it had come, seeing the same green of new leaves on the trees and the greyish blue of the still cold lakes.

It was a long flight until it landed. It's bright, raven eyes saw the open window high up in the tall castle and landed inside on the plush carpet. It shook its wings and folded them to its body. Then it shook again and grew slightly in size. Then it shook again and its feather began to change. Then it shook once more and slowly began to morph back into a beautiful dark-haired woman. Soon Regina Mills stood where the raven had been and she stretched her aching muscles and scowled at what she had heard.

In her mind the same thoughts were swirling round and round. Thoughts of how no one could take her home and something she had spent years building up and just get away with it. Thoughts of how Snow and Charming should have attacked and that if they would not act, she would. Thoughts of how the royals of Swordsbane would never get away with what they had done to her, and yes, even thoughts of how they would never get anywhere near that surprisingly fascinating Princess who still slept peacefully in her room.

The morning had moved on and the hour was nearing when Emma's magic lessons would begin. Regina was in the study room and was placing the two books she wanted to show Emma on the desk in the

middle of the room. The knock on the door was too timid and tentative to be Emma and Regina frowned slightly as she said "come in."

The door opened and Queen Snow walked in. "Hello Regina. I know you have your lesson with Emma soon, I just... wanted to stop by and make sure you have everything you need?"

"Yes. I am very comfortable, thank you," Regina replied and clasped her hands in front of herself, interlacing her fingers to keep from fidgeting.

The mood in the room was so tense that you could have cut it with a knife and neither woman knew how to behave.

Snow wanted to run to Regina, hug her close and ask her a million questions. She wanted to start a friendship that would last for the rest of their lives and she wanted to make Regina smile. But she was old enough to know that human relationships are so much more complicated and jagged than that. This was a different person than the one she had loved as a child and this person was not the type you got close to easily. So how to start?

"Emma mentioned in passing that you might make some alterations to your room? Do please feel free to do that and let me know if we can supply you with anything, fabric or even someone to re-paint the room? It is important to us that you are comfortable."

"Oh. Well, in fact I have... already redecorated. I did it with magic, that way the room will only appear as it is now while I am here. When I leave a simple flick of my wrist will return the room to what it was, bird paintings included," Regina said with a forced smile.

Snow looked abashed. "Yes, I know that most people find my taste a little too girly and syrupy."

Regina fought back the urge to say what an understatement that was and instead just muttered "we all have different taste."

"May I... May I see what you did with the room?" Snow asked tentatively.

Regina tensed even more, giving the impression of that she was a coil wound too tightly and might spring apart soon if this conversation didn't end. Somehow, the idea of the sweet Snow White, the girl who everyone loved as a child and now the woman who has her true love, a wonderful child and an entire kingdom to call her home, somehow the idea of that woman stepping into her bedroom felt... insulting.

"As you wish," Regina replied with a tight jaw. "I will be here to have my lesson with Emma and we won't take a break until luncheon. Feel free to access my rooms until then." Regina knew that she should say that if any of her alterations caused offence they could be changed or at least remind Snow that the changes were not permanent. But she just couldn't manage it. Allowing Snow into that room at all was as polite as she could stand to be right now.

Snow nodded and then she very quickly and very gently let her hand touch Regina's arm as she said "thank you, I am very curious to see what wonders you have worked with the room! It is so nice to see you again, Regina. Thank you for agreeing to teach Emma."

"Well... She has a great talent, it would be a shame to waste it," Regina said quietly.

Snow gave a faint smile and walked to the door while saying "have a great lesson and I will see you at 12 when luncheon will be served."

When Snow was gone Regina released the grip her interlaced fingers had on each other and noticed that they were almost white with how hard she had been clasping them.

Suddenly a loud knock was heard and Emma walked in without waiting to be invited. "Good morning Regina! Did you sleep well?"

Regina squared her shoulders and focused on Emma instead of on her conflicted feelings towards Snow White. "Yes, I don't sleep much but

the few hours I got were satisfactory. You?"

"Yes, not too bad. Although I did have a dream where my magic misfired and I covered the castle in apple sauce. I'm hoping that wasn't foreshadowing of today's lesson!"

"I will ensure that we don't work with apples today just to make sure, Princess. Please have a seat and open your book, let's see how your half-elvish is today."

As Queen Snow made her way up the stairs she collided with a maid carrying fresh towels. She apologized to the maid even though it was clearly the girl's fault that they had crashed. The maid was grateful but shy and rushed off with her towels as soon as she could. Snow smiled kindly at the young girl and shook her head as she remembered being young and shy. Things were so difficult at that age but at the same time so much easier than they were now.

She opened the door to the guest room they had allocated to Regina and gasped softly. Everything in the room that had been powder blue was now either black, charcoal grey or garnet red. The bed was now a four poster bed covered in wine red velvet and the walls were covered in cherry wood shelves containing Regina's herbs, magical potions and all her books instead of the paintings that had been there before.

Thrown over a chair by a vanity table was a long black leather belt. Snow stared at it and reflected on that Regina obviously never wore a belt like that one. Did it belong to a man? Had Regina had a man in the room? Snow looked at the spines of the books on the shelves and felt confused at their strange lettering. Weren't the books on magic supposed to be in the study room? Nothing in this room made sense to Snow. She shook her head and realised that she truly didn't know

Regina and where could she begin? Where could a woman like her start to get close to a woman like Regina?

Snow decided that she would have to talk to Emma about her new tutor as soon as their lesson was over. Still lost in thought she walked down the stairs and passed the door to the study room. From inside she heard her daughter whine "no one can pronounce that, Regina! I don't even think that counts as a word!" Snow smiled faintly before she walked down to see what the kitchen staff were preparing for lunch.

Conveying information

Chapter Notes

Author's note: The half-elvish things bugs me...it's either Elvish or it's not, but it is what Regina said on the show so I am stuck with it. Thank you for reading, reviewing and recommending this story to other readers! It's fanfic fuel and keeps me writing!

Emma walked out of the study room with a scowl. True to her word, Regina had devoted today's lesson to finishing Emma's training in the language of magic, half-elvish. They hadn't gotten even a spark of magic today, unless you counted when Regina bent over to point something out in the book and Emma found herself staring into her cleavage.

She had been distraught at her objectifying behaviour and immediately looked away but Regina had caught the stolen look and very quietly said "it's alright, Princess. I don't mind *you* looking." That had been sparking with a different kind of magic, but other than that... nothing but words and books.

"Good lesson, sweetheart?" Snow asked as she sidled up to Emma and walked down the corridor with her.

"Well... yes, I suppose. Regina says I am finally making progress with half-elvish and that we can start doing more actual magic now, so that is good."

"... but you didn't enjoy this lesson," her mother finished for her with an understanding smile.

"No. I mean there was parts that were good", here Emma had the decency to blush, "but most of it was pretty dry."

Snow looked hesitant as she asked, "but you still like having lessons with Regina, right?"

"Yes! I can see why I have to learn this if I am going to learn spells and such things later. And, I mean, what little magic we have done... was amazing. I now know how to tap into my magic and yesterday I moved an apple!"

"Oh... good. That will come in handy during apple season. I think we have about two hundred apple trees on the estate, think you can move all those apples into baskets?" Snow joked and bumped Emma with her elbow.

"Very funny, Mother," Emma said sardonically and linked arms with the older woman.

"I'm... glad that the two of you are getting along. I was just wondering what your impression of her was," Snow asked without looking in Emma's direction.

Emma looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Regina is... changed from when I knew her," Snow said cautiously.

"Of course she is! She wasn't even twenty when you knew her, she was just a girl."

"Yes, exactly. I knew her then and she was everything I wanted to be. Smart, kind, funny, a brilliant rider and of course dazzlingly beautiful."

Here Emma blushed slightly at her mother's last statement.

Snow continued, "now she has changed and I would like to know how. I'd like to get to know this new Regina. Has she told you anything about her past?"

"Mother. Are you trying to say that you want me to find out things about your childhood hero so you can see if she is still the same girl you looked up to? Why don't you just talk to the woman? She doesn't bite. I mean, she says some pretty biting things but she doesn't *actually* bite," Emma said and suppressed the idea of being bitten by Regina Mills.

"I... I don't know. I get the feeling that she somehow resents me. Maybe because she has changed so much, I clearly knew a more innocent and happy Regina. Maybe being around me reminds her of who she was and what she lost? I don't know. All I know is that I want to know more about the woman who is now living in our home and teaching my daughter."

"You make it sound like she might be dangerous!" Emma chuckled.

"Considering what she can do and the reputation for ruthlessness she has... I'd say she *is* dangerous. I want to make sure she isn't dangerous *to us*. But that isn't my only motive, I do really want to get to know her again. I want her to look at me and be glad to see me, not look like she wants to slap me... which she does now."

"That's probably just because she didn't like the room you gave her. The blue room with all the birds, Mother? Really?"

"That was my favourite guest room! Those oil paintings of blue jays, robins and little sparrows were beautiful!" Snow exclaimed with big eyes.

Emma sighed. "Yes Mother, but they aren't really to everyone's taste."

"Well... you should see what she has done with the room. It looks, well, like a room in a completely different castle."

Emma thought about seeing Regina's bedroom and once again felt her cheeks heating up. Why did that woman have to have this effect on her?

She cleared her throat and turned to her mother. "Tell you what, I'll let you know if I find out something that you should know about Regina. Alright?"

Snow nodded happily. "That sounds perfect!"

Emma made a mental note to only pass on any information that was absolutely necessary, she would *not* let her mother's worry and curiosity break any confidence Regina might bestow on her.

It was time for dinner. Usually Regina would join them for lunch but would just have a platter of cold meats and roasted vegetables in her room in the evening. However, Emma had spent quite a bit of time convincing Regina to join them for dinner that night and when the blonde finally got the half-elvish word for *Summon* correct Regina agreed as a sort of reward.

Regina was now standing by the mirror, trying out different outfits, purple smoke clearing to display yet another variation of a dress. She wanted to draw Emma's attention because, well, Emma's attention is so *delicious*. However, she didn't want the King and Queen to see her as a threat in any way.

After a while, she decided on a sea-green dress with a black bodice made completely of lace on top. It showed cleavage and she created a sapphire necklace to go with it and lay flat just barely above the dip in between her breasts. It was only when she altered the colour of the light blue sapphire to more sea-green that she realised that she had dressed herself completely in the colour of Emma's eyes. She sighed irritably at herself and with an angry wave changed the colour of the dress to auburn and the gem to a clear white diamond.

As she was walking downstairs she cursed herself for the incident with the sea-green. What was wrong with her? The only two people she had ever let into her heart were Daniel and Maleficent and see how that turned out! That day when she stormed out of the Forbidden Fortress with a brand new scar on her lip she swore she would never fall in love

again. Her mother had been right, love was weakness. Not that *this* was love of course, surely it was just an infatuation or pure lust. The girl interested her, that was all!

She was down in the dining hall now and a footman opened the wide, ornate doors for her to enter. The room only had one occupant in it, a certain 25 year old princess who seemed to be busy re-arranging her hair in a fidgeting manner. Regina smirked to herself, it seemed she had not been the only one fussing about her appearance.

Oh but Emma didn't need to worry, she was extraordinarily beautiful just as she was. The pinned up hair that she was fidgeting with left her beautiful swan neck exposed and the pale skin there called to Regina. As the brunette was tracing the line of Emma's neck she noticed that the blonde was wearing a dress with a certain amount of cleavage for once. Regina quirked an eyebrow appreciatively as she saw the tops of two pale mounds rising with Emma's every breath.

Emma looked up and saw her and startled visible.

"Oh, did I frighten you?" Regina said in a low voice.

"A little, and that is impressive because I don't frighten easily," Emma grinned at her.

Regina took in the naked arms showing lean, sword-wielding muscles and the look of resolve in the sea-green eyes and purred "no, I fully believe that you don't, my dear. Where are your parents?"

"They will be delayed. Two of the dwarves have gotten into a fight and are threatening to kill each other for some unknown reason. My father is holding them back and my mother is trying to mediate. Just a normal day in this castle I'm afraid. They said to start without them," Emma explained with an apologetic smile.

Regina tried to hide her joy at the news that the first part of the dinner would contain just the two of them, but stopped trying when she saw Emma giving her a shy smile that seemed to convey the same joy. So

when the butler asked if they should commence serving the dinner both women were smiling at each other in silence. Emma asked him to do so and soon the room filled with footmen serving soup as a starter and offering red or white wine.

When they had all left, Regina took a sip of the leek soup and found it nice if somewhat bland.

Emma picked up her spoon but then put it back down. "So... I wanted to thank you for joining us, well *me*, tonight. It feels so strange to know that you are somewhere else in the castle eating when we are assembled here."

Regina swallowed her sip of soup. "I am quite fond of my privacy and time alone, Princess. Anyway, I thought you would have seen enough of me torturing you over half-elvish glossaries all morning?"

"Exactly! That is why I would like to see you in a situation where you are not telling me *eyes in the book, Princess*," Emma said in an approximation of Regina's rich, dulcet voice.

Regina laughed. "Well, if you paid more attention to the book I wouldn't have to say that."

"*Well....* If you weren't so distracting and the books weren't so dull it wouldn't be a problem," Emma countered with a cheeky smile.

"Oh... *distracting*, am I?" Regina purred with her usual wicked smirk.

"You know you are! I think you know exactly the effect you and that damn cleavage has on me," Emma said and blushed furiously as she hid her embarrassment by drinking a large gulp of wine.

"I see. Perhaps I have noticed your fondness for eyeing me up and down when you think I'm not looking. Oh, don't look so abashed, girl! I do it too. In fact, I'm sure I am thinking much more devilish things when I rake my eyes over your supple body than you are when you ogle me. Attraction is nothing to be ashamed of, Princess."

"Not even when it is forbidden? Like with us?" Emma asked and tried to hide her anxiety over the topic by eating her soup.

Regina waved her hand dismissively. "Forbidden is just a word. Rules, laws and traditions are just things to be bent and broken. Life is too short not to taste the forbidden once in a while."

Emma hummed in agreement but looked unsure.

Regina tilted her head and surveyed her. "Princess? Does the attraction between us worry you? Would you like to end our lessons?"

"No! I... need them," Emma said with a small voice.

Regina looked puzzled, shaken out of her flirtation by Emma's sudden solemnness. "To be able to control your magic?"

Emma furrowed her brow and took a deep breath before she spoke. "Yes. I'm... worried. After what happened with King Robert and Queen Desiree I need to feel that I can control my magic. I pretend that it is mainly to calm my parents' worries, but in all honestly, I fear for myself and for the future of this kingdom if I cannot control my powers."

Regina eat a spoonful of soup as she contemplated her options. She wanted to keep what she had heard in her raven form a secret, simply because she was sure that Snow and Charming would either not deal with it at all or deal with it incorrectly. She knew knowledge was power and she wanted to use this power to get her own revenge on Swordsbane. So why did she feel such an urge to tell Emma everything she knew? Irritated at herself she made the decision reluctantly.

"Emma. Can you keep a secret from your parents? There is a matter regarding this that might be better handled with between you and I."

Emma put her spoon down and looked at Regina seriously. "Of course, Regina. Tell me."

Conflict and a wish to try

Regina had told her, nearly verbatim, what she had heard King Robert and Queen Desiree say.

Emma took it all in with a frown, her soup being abandoned to grow cold in front of her. When she finally looked up at Regina again she quietly asked "I see. Why don't you want to inform my parents about this?"

Regina had left her soup as well and now looked down at the skin slowly forming on its surface as she tried to find the right words.

"I suppose I believe they'll do the *morally right thing* and not what I believe should be done," the brunette stated clearly.

Emma looked severe as she replied "alright. What do you believe should be done? Attack them? Rushing over there and burning the castle down? Starting a war over some empty words they spoke in their bedchamber?"

Regina glared daggers at her. "Of course not! I just want to make sure that they get what they deserve. Revenge is a long game and I plan to play it, rushing in and setting things on fire is for impatient fools. I will wait for *them* to make the first move and then I will ensure that they trip over their own feet. You should be interested in that considering that you are their next intended victim because trust me, Princess, those were not empty words!"

"Oh, so this is only partly about me then? What is it you are getting revenge for? That they took your shop?" Emma asked, irritation rising in her voice.

"No, you stupid girl! This isn't about *possessions*. It's about the fact that I am one of the most powerful people in this realm and I will not

be chased out of my home and my shop like I was some rat that needed exterminating," Regina said with rage and disgust battling for dominance on her features.

Emma crossed her arms over her chest. "If you are so powerful and so hell bent on revenge... why are you here now? Why not lay in wait for your enemies?"

"I *am* lying in wait for them. The reason I am doing it from your home is that they want *you*. They will come for you and when they do they will find you to be a match for them and more than that, they will find me waiting behind you," Regina said evenly but in her lap her hands were clenching into fists.

Emma huffed out a breath and spoke with her jaw clenched. "Is that your plan?"

"I don't have a fully-fledged plan yet. I am gathering information and biding my time, much like they are. The question, *Princess*, is what are you doing?"

"Preparing to fight! Learning to defend myself better than I already can. My parents didn't raise some dainty, spoiled little princess. My father taught me how to fight with a sword and my mother taught me how to shoot a bow and they both taught me to never run from a fight," Emma stormed in an ever rising tone of voice.

Regina interrupted her with a scoff and said "shooting a bow? Really? I seem to recall a young princess who used to cry to high heavens if she bruised her knee!"

Emma's voice rose even louder as she said "well that isn't who my mother has been as an adult. When my parents fell in love a war was nearly started and my grandfather threatened my mother with all kinds of punishments for stealing his bartering treasure, *sorry I mean prince*, away! That was when my mother learned to shoot a bow and now she is very adept at it. But, as much as they have taught me of fighting and strategy, the one thing they always falter on is that they always believe

in finding the good in everyone. Their innocence and sweet temper has meant that I have had to be the savvy one. I have had to be the one who distrusts and looks for ulterior motives, because they tend not to!"

"What are you trying to tell me here, Princess?" Regina drawled while her lazy, mocking tone was belied by the fiery rage in her eyes.

"I'm trying to say that I don't need you to defend me! I am not some little victim for you to *save* nor to use as *bait* for Swordsbane! My parents have taught me to fight and I have learnt how to mistrust on my own. I can handle Robert and Desiree! All I need from you is to teach me how to use my magic to handle them in a more efficient and less messy way. So get off your high horse, teach me magic and then if you have no other reason to wish to be around me... take your little revenge plans elsewhere," Emma replied with her hands now holding a firm grip on the edge of the table and her features set in determined anger and hurt.

That pale, wounded face shouldn't concern Regina at all. This woman was nothing to her but a pupil and a means to an end. So why did that hurt puppy-look wrench at her heart like this? Regina took a moment to swallow the bitter taste of having to apologize. "Alright. I'm ... I'm sorry. I am not used to being around others anymore. I've been going along for years with only my two shopkeepers, my customers and the occasional guest in my bed as company, so my social skills seem to be a bit rusty. I didn't mean to make you feel like I was using you as bait, and I do truly believe you when you say that you can take care of yourself."

Emma looked like she barely believed a syllable that came over Regina's full, red lips. She stood and walked over to the head of the table where her parents would have been seated and rang the bell to signal to the servants that they were ready for the next course.

Without looking at Regina she said "fine. Let's have the main course brought in before it goes dry in the kitchen." All the anger and bluster was gone from Emma now, leaving only sadness and a strange feeling of disappointment.

"Of course. Perhaps I should leave? Maybe this was a bad idea? We don't know each other very well and so misunderstandings are bound to happen, especially with strong-willed people like you and I. Perhaps we should keep our interaction contained to the study room and the polite luncheons," Regina said and began to get ready to leave the table.

Emma raised her hand to stop her. "No, don't go. Don't worry about our mutual outburst, I promised to keep your secret and I will. I won't tell my parents that Robert and Desiree are still planning to get hold of me by any means necessary, I don't want to worry them until we have something concrete, anyway. If you wish to go because I am only a means to an end for you then feel free. I just... wanted to spend some more time with you tonight, non-study time I mean."

Regina took a deep breath as she regarded the younger woman. Everything in her wanted to deliver a sharp comment to push Emma away completely and then retire to her room, but something about those sad green eyes and the defeated posture with which Emma sat down again stopped her. Just as she was about to open her mouth to say that Emma wasn't *just* a means to an end but someone who intrigued her, the door was opened. The butler and the four footmen brought in the main course and beverages. Following just behind them were the king and queen.

"Oh that is good news! Snow, look, we didn't miss the main course!" Charming exclaimed and clapped his hands loudly before striding over to give his daughter a kiss on the cheek.

He saw her fake a smile, a little too late, and asked "is everything ok here?"

Emma looked at Regina. Sad sea-green eyes meet enigmatic dark brown ones. In a quiet voice the princess answered "it's been a tiring day. I think I just need an early night, otherwise I am fine. How are the dwarves?"

"Impossible!" Snow breathed and went over to give Emma a kiss as well. By the time she reached her daughter Emma was smiling more convincingly and so Snow never suspected anything was wrong. The food was served and they all went through the following two courses while Snow and Charming explained what the fuss had been about with the dwarves.

Occasionally Emma and Regina would share a glance, eyes heavy with unasked questions and unsaid assurances. Emma was wishing that she was more than a tool for Regina to use in the fight against King Robert and Queen Desiree, and Regina was feeling the unfamiliar pangs in her chest from knowing that she had hurt and disappointed someone who mattered. Neither of them ate very much that night.

During the lesson next morning the mood was tense and every little word started up an argument or a chilled silence. Emma seemed moody and unfocussed and they were both distracted about what had happened last night. Despite this, Emma managed to once again move the apple from Regina's hands to her own and then to even move it back. They repeated this a few times and then it was time for the princess to learn how to levitate the apple in mid-air.

It took a few attempts but suddenly the apple floated shakily in the air in front of Emma. The blonde held her hands out to help focus her magic on the item and her hands shook terribly. A wrinkle formed between Regina's eyes at the sight of it, she hated messy magic gestures. She walked over to Emma and stood next to the blonde, reaching a hand out to grasp around Emma's right hand and steady it as she said "use your muscles and smooth your frame, Emma. Don't let the magic control you, you control it!"

At the feel of the slightly colder but maddeningly soft hand on her own Emma gasped and gave an involuntary tremble. The apple fell to the ground with a loud thud as Emma jerked her hand away from Regina as if the older woman's touch had burned her."

Regina sighed and put her hands on her hips. This had gotten *complicated*, she hated *complicated*.

"Alright, Princess. I think that is all we will achieve today. We need to start relaxing around each other or your studies will never progress. Why don't we do what you suggested and spend some more time getting to know each other? How about we... go for a ride? Get some fresh air and exercise? You can show me around your parents' royal grounds."

Emma smiled for the first time that day as she said "*my grounds*, one day."

Regina gave an incredulous laugh. "Why yes... Your Majesty! *Your grounds*, does that ring better in your royal ears?"

"Much," Emma replied with a shy but cheeky smile.

"Alright. Let's go to our rooms and get changed and I will meet you down by the stables. Oh, I beg your pardon... *Your future stables*," Regina said with a smirk and a quirked eyebrow which made Emma forget her hurt feelings for a second and feel a pulling sensation in her lower abdomen instead.

As the door closed behind the brunette Emma wondered if they could clear the air. Clearly neither of them was very good at being open and vulnerable but still... there was a feeling of that they both wanted to *try*. That feeling stopped Emma from fully assuming that Regina was just using her, but it was a faint feeling and Emma hoped that their ride would prove a chance to fortify it.

Ride

Chapter Notes

Author's note: A few of you have voiced apprehension at the DragonQueen history of this story. This is the first chapter where we find out a little more about Regina's past with Mal, skip it if you need to but you'll be missing key developments in Regina's relationship with Emma if you do.

They met at the stables as they had said they would. When Regina arrived Emma was standing by her horse and speaking vividly with one of the stable boys. The young lad looked nervous to be speaking to his princess but amused by the jokes she was clearly making.

Regina watched her as she approached, the princess was all strength, health and feminine beauty in her light blue riding coat and grey trousers and high boots. Her blonde hair was in a braid but a couple of long strands had left it, giving the impression of it having been created in haste. The cold wind painted Emma's high cheekbones in a light blush and did the same with the tip of her ever so slightly upturned nose. Emma looked so clean and healthy that Regina felt like she might contaminate the beautiful princess with her dark deeds and her raging soul.

"Regina! There you are! I was just telling John here how I am going to challenge you to a race and win," Emma said gleefully.

Regina thought of the hurt expression on the woman's face less than 30 minutes ago and wondered if Emma's fast change of mood was due to the woman's age or just her personality.

"I see, your Majesty. You seem very certain of your victory," Regina replied calmly as she put her riding gloves on.

"I am! Few people can catch me when I am on Beetle," Emma grinned and patted a palomino horse on the flank. The yellowish horse didn't look much in the way of appearance, it was stocky and surprisingly a bit raggedy in places, but it kept moving around with the same confidence and restlessness as Emma and she assumed that this must be the appeal for the picky princess. *They both looked like they were meant to run wild*, Regina thought.

"His name is Beetle?" Regina asked with a quirk of the eyebrow.

"Ha! Yes, he was always snuffling around the grass and rolling in it when he was a foal. My father said he looked like a little beetle!" Emma explained grinningly.

Regina merely rolled her eyes. A sleek, black horse was brought forth for her and Regina eyed it appreciatively. Emma shyly murmured "I chose her for you but if she isn't to your liking, just let me know and I'll have another fetched for you."

Regina smiled as she thought about Emma choosing such an elegant creature for her. "That depends, is she fast?"

Emma grinned widely again as she assured, "like lightning!"

Regina walked over to the majestic creature and stroked its neck. "Then she'll be perfect. What's her name?"

Emma watched Regina caress the horse and saw the sleek animal respond to her immediately as the mare buffed Regina's chest softly and walked a few paces closer to her.

"Her name is Imperia and she seems to like you!"

Regina just smiled enigmatically and said "what can I say, I have a way with women."

Suddenly Emma had an overpowering need to rush over to Regina and kiss that smile away, those perfectly shaped lips, today painted in a light plum colour, looked so inviting it made Emma shiver.

To stop herself from doing anything rash, Emma mounted Beetle and got comfortable in her seat. Regina followed suit and was soon sitting on Imperia and stroking her pitch-black mane lovingly.

Emma really tried to not look at how Regina's legs were clamped around the horse, but the impossibly tight black leather trousers Regina wore didn't make that easy. Emma looked from the lithe legs wrapped around the mare and up to Regina's torso, which was covered in a riding coat of the exact same colour as her lipstick, and up to her beautiful face... which was smirking.

"There's those roving eyes again, Princess. Tell me... are you always this obvious?"

Emma paled. "I...I... well, yes, probably. I just haven't had much practice with this stuff."

"Ah, now that is a crying shame. A woman like you should be loved. *Loved long and hard*," Regina replied and raised both her eyebrows in a suggestive way to accompany her sensual smirk.

Emma cleared her throat and looked down at her horse while pretending to fiddle with the reins. Regina laughed at her unease and Emma glared at her for it. Then the blonde took off, her and Beetle riding off at such a speed that it took a while for Regina to recover her wits and follow them. The brunette realised that Emma must have a special connection with Beetle as the stallion followed her every whim before she seemed to have given it the prompt.

Emma was fast and a good rider in general but Regina had been riding since she was a child and despite her magically youthful appearance, she was now in her late fifties. She had experience and she had a way of connecting with horses. They and Regina tended to understand each other, both being edgy creatures, quick to emotion and with a need for

the space to run free. So Regina rode Imperia as if they had known each other for years, getting the feel for the mare's temperament and strengths with every foot they travelled. By the time they passed a small creek, Regina knew how to ride Imperia to beat Emma and her scruffy heap of muscle of a horse.

She simply rode up right next to Emma and Beetle and did a quick turn, feinting that she was turning off the dirt road, by the time Emma and the palomino had begun to turn to follow her Regina smoothly turned Imperia back onto the dirt road and passed Emma and Beetle easily. After that it was just a matter of maintaining speed until Emma and her stronger but heavier stallion would tire and need a rest. Her instincts were right and it wasn't long until Beetle began to flag and slow down slightly. Regina kept up her pace and by the time they reached a barley field she could barely see Emma behind her.

Regina smiled and came to a halt. She patted Imperia's neck and whispered "that's my girl. We showed those boasters how to win a race, didn't we?"

By the time Emma and the stallion reached them the blonde was scowling and Beetle was exhausted. As Emma dismounted, Regina avoided gloating and just said "I suggest we let the horses rest for a while."

She flicked her hand and made a trough filled with water appear by the side of the dirt road. They led the horses over to it and allowed them to drink their fill. Emma sat down cross-legged by the side of the road and Regina joined her, sitting down carefully and folding her legs under her and to the side to keep the dirt from the road off her riding coat.

Emma puffed out a breath and said "alright. You beat me and you did it expertly, Lady Mills."

"I've asked you not to call me that. And I wouldn't worry too much about me winning over you. Ask your mother and she will tell you that I was always a prolific rider. I actually had stables built in the

Forbidden Fortress. Getting horses that could handle the steep incline of the mountain wasn't easy. I had to get a special breed of horses imported from the highlands. They were cute and sturdy but nothing compared to a running machine like Imperia here," Regina said as she watched the mare drinking next to them.

Emma creased her forehead as she thought hard. "The Forbidden Fortress? I've heard of that but I can't remember where or what."

Regina took a deep breath. "The Forbidden Fortress is the home of Maleficent, I'm sure you know of her."

Emma chuckled wryly. "Yes, it's hard to miss someone who turns into a dragon and burns whole towns when she is in a bad mood."

Regina grimaced as if the words had hurt her. "In all fairness, it wasn't just because she was in bad moods. She always had a reason, usually that they tried to kill her or steal her wealth. I should know, I often rode her into those towns and pointed out good places to start the fires."

Emma bit her tongue to not say something to show her outrage at all those dead villagers. They were finally speaking properly and leaving last night's unpleasantness behind them, she wasn't quite ready to give that up yet.

"Hang on... you *rode* her?" Emma asked instead.

Regina leaned her head back and laughed. "I told you I was a proficient rider."

Emma let out a loud breath and looked very impressed.

"Oh, it wasn't such big deal for me. She was my mentor, my friend and my lover, a little bit of flying wasn't what made the most impression on me during those years," Regina said calmly and brushed dust off her sleeve.

"She was *your lover*?" Emma queried tentatively.

Regina swallowed visibly and looked out into the field as she answered. "She was my lover and... my beloved. I have loved two people in my life and she was the second one."

Emma couldn't stop herself from feeling a pang of jealousy. "So, why aren't you still together?"

Regina gave a sad smile as she placed her hands on the ground behind herself and leant back on them. "Sometimes love isn't enough, Princess. When two people are too alike they tend to hurt each other more than they help each other. The fights were... *legendary*. One day I found myself physically attacking her, throwing her across the floor with magic. She retaliated and soon the fight was as much with spells as with fists. Finally she attacked me with a very powerful spell and it hit me in the face. It was so strong that it left a mark that neither of us could heal when we calmed down," here Regina pointed to the scar on her lip.

After a deep breath she continued. "We sat down and talked about it and decided we would have to split up or we would kill each other. It was so hard to walk out that door, though. We had spent more than 20 years together and we had grown so close that it was sometimes hard to tell where one of us ended and the other started. We were a good team when we weren't fighting... but we did have a tendency to bring out the worst in each other and we were, as I said, too alike. So I walked out that day, my lip still bleeding and my few chosen belongings in a large satchel. I cried all the way to the nearest village and hired a carriage to take me to any location far away. It ended up being Swordsbane."

Emma looked at the brunette and wondered what she should say. "So, um, were you always fighting? I mean in the start it must have been better, right?"

Regina sighed longingly. "Yes, yes it was. I was young and she was everything I wanted to be. I fell head over heels, and so did she. She

took me in as an apprentice and it only took a week until I was sharing her bed and learning as much there as I did during our magic lessons. We barely slept for the first few months, all we did was eat, sleep, make love and practice magic. It was... intoxicating and so *easy*. She let me see all her dark sides and I found them mirrored in myself. After a while we both became cruel towards the rest of the world, after all... what were they to us? We didn't need them and they only feared and hated us. We were invincible and it was us against the world. But... that sort of thing doesn't last."

Emma noticed the sadness on Regina's beautiful features and after a moments silence she changed the subject. "Did you use a saddle?"

Regina started and turned her head towards Emma. "Excuse me?"

"When you rode on her in dragon form, did you use a saddle?"

Regina laughed, long and heartfelt. "You are *adorable*, Princess. I usually don't like *adorable* but you... you seem to have me fascinated."

Emma felt a new sensation at those words, as if someone had put little summer moths in her chest and they fluttered wildly. She felt brave and decided to place her hand on top of Regina's on the ground. Regina didn't move away and so they just sat there in silence, hearing nothing but the chilly spring wind blowing through the barley field and the soft noises of the horses drinking water. Although Emma could have sworn that her heart was beating loud enough for them both to hear it.

The apple and the orchid

The next morning it was time for another magic lesson. When Emma had woken up she had been frightened that the mood would be strange or that Regina would be distant because of her impulsive notion to hold her hand yesterday. Sure, Regina had seemed fine as they had headed back to the castle but then the brunette decided to once again have dinner up in her room that evening.

Emma just couldn't read the signals, if in fact they were supposed to be signals, perhaps Regina hadn't cared at all about the touching? After all, the brunette seemed a lot more relaxed about physical interaction than any woman Emma had ever met and hand holding was quite innocent in the grand scheme of things, especially compared to someone licking apple sauce off your fingers. But perhaps holding hands was more intimate?

Regina woke her from her reverie by smiling politely at her and diving straight into the lesson.

"Right, by now we know you can easily move an apple from my hands to yours. Next thing is conjuring your own apple. Do you remember reading about that?"

Emma thought about the different thick tomes in half-elvish that she had read in the last week and feebly said "eh, yes, I think so?"

Regina rolled her eyes. "Please, try not to blow me away with your certainty, Princess. How about what I told you about conjuring things that first time we did magic? That you have to go deeper and imagine where the item came from? Do you remember that at least?"

"Yes. So... If I'm conjuring an apple I have to think of how it grew?"

"As an example, yes. It's just a way to guide your magic. Think of the basic things about the item and your subconscious and your magic will do the rest. Now I warn you, this will take time to master. *Don't be impatient.*"

Emma dipped her head in understanding and then held her hands out and closed her eyes.

She thought about an apple growing on a branch of one of the trees in her parent's orchard. She thought about it being a hard little thing and slowly growing full and sweet. Then she tried to imagine it reddening and becoming soft enough to eat and just then she felt a weight in her hands. Excited, she opened them and stared at what was clearly an apple, but also clearly not ripe. The orb was too small, too hard and far too green.

"Don't look so disappointed, Princess. I told you this would take time and you are off to a good start," Regina's rich voice assured her. Emma closed her eyes for a second and enjoyed the warm, deep voice with its familiar rasp a little more than she should. Then she threw the undeveloped apple aside and opened her hands and closed her eyes to try again.

She did what she had done last time, but now she focused extra on the part where the apple ripened. Almost smelling the scent of the skin of the apple in the warm sunlight, she opened her eyes to see a large red apple in her hands. Her face drew into a grimace as she realised that it wasn't just red, it was brown too. The smell coming off it was disgusting and curdled in her nostrils, the apple was clearly overripe and she made a point not to touch the slightly wrinkly surface of it more than she had to.

"Allow me," Regina said and waved her hand to vanish the slowly rotting apple. "Now try again."

Emma took a deep breath and closed her eyes again. Once more she thought of an apple growing and focused on how it would be when it was perfect and ready to fall off the branch. Her forehead wrinkled as

she worked her mind as much as she could, locking out everything around herself and thinking about the perfect apple with every part of her. For the third time she felt a weight in her outstretched hands and opened her eyes to see a flawless, red apple.

"Good! Well done. That looks perfect and you managed it surprisingly fast," Regina admitted.

Emma smiled at the shining fruit in her hands as if it was her firstborn. Regina watched her rapt face and remembered her own joy and pride as her magic grew. The first time she had made a fully formed fireball she had actually jumped for joy and almost burned the Forbidden Fortress down.

"Now take a bite," Regina said and placed her hands on her hips.

Emma looked up at her in confusion. "What?"

"It's an apple, dear. It's meant to be eaten, not just viewed. How will you know that it is right unless you taste it?"

Emma shrugged as if to say *good point* and held the apple in one hand to take a healthy bite. Regina had known ladies, and women of even higher social standard than that, who only ate fruit if it was peeled and sliced up in dainty bits, but the woman in front of her now took a bite out of the apple with the ease of someone who had no time for such dainty fripperies. Regina smirked with pleasure, she liked the way Emma just took what she wanted and how she ate with such obvious appetite.

But Emma soon recoiled from the bit of apple in her mouth and spat it out. "Ogre's balls... that tastes like... leaves!"

Regina laughed right out at the profanity that spilled over Emma's pink lips as well as the frustrated look on the pretty features. Emma glared up at her and Regina recognised the look of hurt pride and regretted her laugh. It was just so hard not to laugh at her spirited but adorable pupil.

To soften the blow, Regina stepped over to Emma, once again invading the blonde's space, and grasped Emma's hand which held the apple. She lifted Emma's hand and the apple with it to her lips, which today were painted cherry red, and slowly brought her tongue out to lick the white apple flesh where Emma had taken a bite.

Emma couldn't help it, she let out a little groan of pleasure at the sight of the red tongue sliding over the exposed indentation in the apple. Regina immediately retracted her tongue at the sound, disconcerted that she was more effected by that little groan than she should have been. It had run through her body and settled in the apex of her sex where she felt herself actually harden slightly. The fact that a mere groan from Emma had that effect on her was alarming, she was never that easy to affect and her own lack of control disturbed her. She moved away from Emma and tried to bring this back to a more neutral level again.

"You are right. It does taste like leaves but it also tastes like unripened apple, which means that you are on the right path. Try again," she ordered and waved her hand to make the strange-tasting apple vanish.

Emma managed another two attempts. The first time the apple came out fine but at the taste test it turned out to have several worms living in it. Regina commended her for her realism but bade her try again. This time Emma produced an apple which was an unnatural pink colour and in frustration she threw the pink fruit at the nearest wall.

There is that royal upbringing, Regina thought. *As soon as something becomes too difficult the temper flares up.* Out loud she merely said "and now we are back to mashed apple" as she watched the crushed pink apple sloshing down the wall and landing wetly on the floor.

"It's impossible," Emma whined and looked like she regretted her tantrum.

Regina sighed and held out her hand. Without even closing her eyes she first created a perfect apple and then, as Emma watched it, the fruit

changed into an elaborate, strange white flower with red flecks. Emma stared at it as if she was hypnotized.

"This," Regina said impatiently, "is an orchid. I have never seen an orchid and yet I know that *this* is what it looks like and that *this* is what it smells like. I can reproduce it perfectly from just having heard sailors, who were coming back from foreign shores, telling me about it."

Regina's elegant fingers caressed the delicate flower petals as she spoke and when she said "I can do this, because I have *practised* and learnt from my mistakes", her fingers gently stroked the edge of the little cup that made up the centre of the petals and Emma felt her heart begin to beat unevenly.

The flower was unlike any Emma had ever seen, it was so beautiful and so outlandish. Emma watched entranced as Regina's fingers moved over it and soon her gaze travelled from the flower to Regina's hand. The skin on it was smooth and golden-hued and she could see a few slightly raised veins make a pattern on the back of it. Emma found herself wanting to trace the veins with her tongue and shivered helplessly.

"Are you listening to me?" Regina snapped.

"Y-Yes," Emma stammered.

"Good. Do you see what I am trying to tell you here?"

Emma nodded, suddenly shamefaced and angry at having her temper tantrum rubbed in her face.

"Yes, you are trying to say that it's not at all impossible for me to make an apple when you can easily do something like that. I just have to be patient and practice," she muttered.

"Why look at that, not just a pretty face then, Princess? Now... try again," she commanded and squeezed the delicate flower in her hand

as if to crush it. Emma drew in breath at the notion of ruining something so beautiful but when Regina opened her hand, it contained only a small object.

Regina offered it to Emma and casually asked "care for an aniseed comfit?"

Emma smiled and took the small sweet from Regina's palm. She popped it in her mouth and realised that it tasted exactly like the aniseed comfits that their cooks would make for special occasions.

"It *can be done* and you will learn how. When I am finished with you, you will not just be able to defend yourself with magic, you'll be able to create beautiful and even delicious objects. Magic isn't just a weapon, it's an *art*. Something that the feckless King Robert and his bitch of a queen haven't understood," Regina snarled with a look of disdain on her elegant features.

Emma looked up at her and now her sea-green eyes shone with determination. Then she held out her hands and while still staring straight into Regina's eyes she slowly created an apple. Regina felt the small hairs on her neck stand up at the confrontation of those eyes, the way they pierced into her made her feel like something very intimate and uncontrollable was happening. Regina didn't like how it made her feel, she didn't like how it made her heart race and her sex tingle. Those eyes were dangerous in all their boldness and candour. She broke the eye contact when the apple was fully formed in Emma's hands.

Without getting the prompt, Emma picked up the apple to taste it and soon smiled with her closed mouth full of crisp, juicy apple.

Regina still felt flustered and disturbed by the blonde's effect on her and so she only sardonically muttered "I take it by your pleased expression that it actually tastes of apple?"

When Emma nodded Regina gave a curt smile and said "good. I suggest that for the rest of the lesson you bring the book on conjuring

spells with you to your room or out in the gardens. You need to understand all the theory behind the magic or you'll never be able to wield it properly."

Emma whined at the suggestion but a commanding glare from Regina quieted her. Emma realised that Regina wasn't at ease any more but she didn't know why. Silently she put the apple down on the desk and went to fetch the book. When she had it she unobtrusively said "would you mind if I read it here, with you? I'll still focus on the text, I promise."

Regina tightened her jaw. She really wanted to be alone to try and get herself under control again but she didn't want Emma questioning her obvious attempts to get rid of her. In a voice which successfully hid her discomfort Regina said "of course. Sit where you please, it is your future castle after all! Read quietly and I shall go through the rest of the books to plan the next step in your education."

Emma nodded apprehensively and sat down to read. Regina spent a while staring unseeingly at the magic books on the shelf as she analysed her feelings. What bothered her was that she was only ever such a slave to her desire when there were deeper feelings involved and she knew that it would be a terrible idea to fall for this young princess. In fact, with her track record it would be a terrible idea to fall for *anyone*.

By the light of fire

Chapter Notes

Author's note: I'm sorry this chapter is shorter than I would like. I haven't had much time to write today. I promise you'll get more tomorrow! (I also promise that the built up sexual tension will be dealt with very soon.)

That evening Regina found herself joining the royals for supper. She tried so very hard to convince herself that it wasn't because she wanted to be near Emma and it *almost* worked.

Charming and Emma looked up in surprise when Regina strode in halfway through the starter, but Snow just jumped up with only the slightest creak in her knees and, completely unnecessarily, led Regina to a seat at the long table. When she was seated and a footman had been sent to fetch another bowl of fish soup, Emma smiled at Regina. It was a smile built up of as much joy as enamoured shyness and Regina couldn't help returning it, despite the young woman's parents being in the room.

Supper was a stilted but pleasant enough affair. Conversation mostly circled around riding and magic. Regina had to admit that she felt annoyed at Snow's incessant questions but she stayed patient and answered with surprising grace. When it was time for the dessert, which consisted of treacle tarts and cream, Regina turned to Emma and said "perhaps your mother would like a fresh, crisp apple with all that sweetness?"

Queen Snow looked from Regina to Emma with obvious confusion and said "but it's not apple season?"

"With a daughter as unique as yours, it's always apple season," Regina said and Emma couldn't help but hear the pride in her voice. It was that pride that made Emma convinced that she *could* create a faultless apple this time. After all, Regina's reputation as a teacher was on the line here and so the older woman must be absolutely convinced in her talent.

Emma held out her hands and concentrated so hard it made her head hurt. Soon that familiar weight was in her palms and she begged the powers of magic to not reveal a rotten apple when she opened her eyes. When she did open them she saw an apple which looked edible, however it was a little pale. Regina saw Emma staring hesitantly at it and discreetly flicked her hand under the table, making the apple grow beautifully red and shiny. Emma smiled at the fruit, clueless to Regina's help, and then reached the apple over to Snow.

Charming laughed and began to applaud loudly. Snow just stared at it before she laughed as well. "Emma! This is amazing! You can make fruit out of thin air?"

"Well, only apples so far but it's a start, right? I mean who wants pears anyway?" Emma said with an embarrassed shrug.

Snow went to take a bite of the apple and Emma startled with the worry that the apple might taste like leaves again. Before she warned her mother she caught Regina's eye though, the brunette shook her head discreetly to stop her from speaking. Emma looked back apprehensive but calmed visibly at Regina's confident smile.

Snow took a bite from the fruit and broke out in an appreciative "mmm" before Charming reached out and took the apple from her. He took a big bite and then spoke with his mouth full of apple "this is delicious, I'm never picking real apples again. Yours are much better, sweetheart!"

Emma smiled and drank some of her wine to hide her embarrassment. She wished she was striking a more confident figure in front of her teacher and shot the older woman a glance before putting her goblet back at the table.

Regina caught the glance and winked discreetly at her before addressing Emma's parents. "Emma has shown great aptitude for magic and despite her occasional reluctance to put in the hard work, she is making great progress surprisingly fast."

After that the dessert was accompanied by discussions on what Emma was learning and the mechanics behind it. Emma let Regina do most of the talking and spent an inappropriate amount of time just staring at the knowledgeable and charismatic brunette.

With dinner over Regina retired to her room to read. Emma spent as much time as she could muster with her parents, they played board games and had the court's lute player perform a few songs. When Emma couldn't stand the restlessness she felt at being away from Regina any longer, she faked a yawn and said that she was retiring to her bedchamber. Her parents kissed her goodnight and Emma walked up the long winding stairs.

Her bedroom was in the opposing wing of Regina's and Emma lamented the opportunity to listen at the brunette's door. It was still early... surely the brunette was still awake? Emma shook her head at her own foolishness, Regina wasn't for her. She had to stop obsessing over the stunning sorceress.

Emma opted to undress herself instead of ringing for a handmaiden do it, she just couldn't bare anyone else's company. Only *hers*. Emma lit some of her candles and then unfastened the many clasps of her dress and slid it down her body while wondering if Regina was still dressed. It was as if her mind had decided to sabotage any attempt not to think about Regina, the harder Emma tried to keep her thoughts away from mahogany eyes and sarcastic jokes the more her mind craved them.

Now only in her white shift, Emma walked to the window and stood looking out as she took out the pins keeping her elaborate coiffure on her head. It was a moonlit night and she could see the gardens below clearly.

Suddenly a bright light caught her eye, it was a ball of fire and it burned in the palm of a person in a window in the opposite wing. *Regina*. Suddenly Emma's questions were rapidly answered. No, Regina wasn't sleeping. No, Regina wasn't still dressed. In fact, Regina was... stark naked. Emma could see divine expanses of golden skin which glowed in the light of the fire ball. She could even make out the dark triangle between Regina's legs. At the sight, Emma felt as if someone had punched her in the stomach. Her breathing was ragged and her heart beat unevenly. She knew she should look away but she couldn't, she stared transfixed at the naked woman in the window.

After only a few moments Regina blew her a taunting kiss and extinguished her fire ball. Emma couldn't be sure but as she squinted desperately she thought she could see Regina's retreating form move from the window to her bed.

Suddenly rage flashed through Emma. Why was Regina teasing her if they could never be together? She considered rushing over there to ask the brunette but then... she realised the folly of the notion. She neither wanted to tempt herself worse, upset her much needed instructor nor end up touching Regina without her consent. Emma closed her eyes and tried to still her heart to its normal beat.

It almost worked but it did nothing for the pounding in her sex. Emma knew there was only one solution open to her. She blew out her candles, went to her bed and laid down and before the smoke from the candles had cleared her hand was working between her legs and she was quietly whimpering. She tried so very hard to keep Regina's name from escaping her lips and she managed it all the way until her climax when she soundlessly moaned the name of her desire. *Regina, oh Regina*.

Tension and decorum

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Some of this chapter is not safe for work.

There was no way Emma could disguise her sulkiness the next morning. Her mood swung from anger to disappointment to rejection and then back again, her resulting behaviour and physical appearance could only be described as sullen. Regina on the other hand acted as if nothing was wrong and they were just student and teacher getting on with their work.

Emma had been handed a book about magical conjuring written in the far away desert lands. Regina had promised that the book would be interesting and give a lot of insight. Maybe it would, if Emma could just focus on it and stop thinking about what she wanted to scream in Regina's face, sentences like *what kind of game are you playing* , *what do you want from me* and *stop teasing me and just kiss me* flitted through her mind and then died down again. The unfairness of Regina's behaviour made her blood boil.

Emma turned the page and here was an elaborate drawing showing how you could conjure an animal into being.

"Ah, now this is something you won't be ready for yet. It will probably take a few years and even then... I would advise against it. This magic takes a lot of energy and can often backfire," Regina said as she leant over Emma's shoulder to point to the drawing. This meant that Regina wasn't just very close now but also that Emma could feel the slight

brushing of her tutor's breasts against her shoulder. Emma's body betrayed her and ignored her anger to fill her with unwelcome arousal.

Emma snapped "would you mind not standing so close? I can *smell you* really strongly and it's very distracting."

Regina raised an eyebrow and *almost* smirked as she purred "oh, but I'm not wearing perfume today, Princess."

"Then it must be the smell of you toying with me like a cat with a damned mouse," Emma growled. She stood up so suddenly that once again she knocked her chair to the floor and then she stormed out.

Regina watched her go and felt a hitch in her chest. She just couldn't stop herself from flirting and teasing Emma. Her own desire for the blonde was driving her crazy and she worried that her heart was somehow involved as well. It scared her and very little in this world ever did that. Last night she had wanted to make Emma come to her room and end the way they danced around each other, but the blonde had never showed up, despite her little display with the fireball. Now she was wondering if Emma had not been the one making all the right decisions.

She thought of everything that was happening in Swordsbane, she thought about how she had no other occupation right now than her revenge and teaching Emma and then she thought of how it would feel to leave this castle and not see Emma again. She had to stay. But... that meant making sure that everything was fine between her and the princess again. She walked out of the study room with a frown on her pensive face.

Slowly she made her way up winding stairs and long corridors, hoping to find Emma in her bedchamber. As she walked she fought an internal battle, a battle of what she should do when she reached Emma. Could she convince the blonde princess that they could just be tutor and student? Was she going to have to reveal her feelings? Was there a way to pretend everything that had happened was just a misunderstanding?

Suddenly she was outside of Emma's door. It felt like the long walk had just gone by in a blink of an eye. She knocked on the tall wooden door and Emma opened it. The blonde's face fell when she saw who it was.

"What do you want?"

"I wish to speak to you. About... what has been going on."

"Oh, will this be the kind of speaking where we honestly discuss what is going on between us or will you be licking my fingers, telling me I can ogle you if I like and then you'll take your clothes off?" Emma growled with her face set in determination and anger.

"Please let me in, Princess. This is not a discussion suited for other's ears."

Emma couldn't disagree with that and so stood aside to let Regina pass. Emma closed the door behind them and stood with her arms crossed over her chest.

Looking into Emma's eyes, Regina gathered that this wouldn't be easy. She also realised that she could neither pretend that everything was normal or convince Emma to join her in bringing their relationship back to neutral ground. They were too far gone, Regina could feel it in how her hands itched with need to touch the blonde and how her blood rushed in her ears. Why did she come here? What could she achieve?

They stood silently staring at each other. When Regina arrived Emma had wanted to scream at her for toying with her desire and making her feel like a foolish girl but now... now she saw insecurity in Regina's eyes and so she remained quiet. She was in no hurry, she could wait for Regina to find her words. She felt like she could wait for the rest of her life as long as she could be in this room with this woman.

Regina found her mouth going dry and wanted to shake herself. She was always in control of the situation and she was even more in control of *herself*, so shy couldn't she behave like normal? Her ire rose

at the situation and she desperately wanted to take back control, her mind raced and gave her only one solution. Sex. Raw, pure sex. She wanted it and Emma wanted it. She would force any lingering emotions out of her dusty heart with raw, animalistic lust. Her pulse quickened, her breathing increased and she felt as if someone had released gin into her bloodstream. She gave a feral smile and stared at Emma's body, knowing that she would soon own it.

Emma watched the change from apprehensive insecurity to sexual predator in Regina and couldn't understand what had happened behind those glittering, brown eyes. But she knew that the way Regina was looking at her made her feel... *incredible*. She could see that Regina would pounce on her at any second and she realised that this was unacceptable, she was next in line for the throne and she was a woman who fought for what she wanted and *won it*. In two paces she was on Regina and was claiming the red-lipped mouth as if her life depended on it.

Regina gave as good as she got and began to grab at Emma's curves under the multi-layered dress during the deep kiss. Emma felt her sex pulsate as if it was about to erupt and she realised that she had never been this aroused in her entire life. Feeling almost intoxicated, Emma decided that Regina would be made to *feel her need* and spend the day satiating it.

Regina felt Emma's mouth leave her own and the eager lips and tentative teeth travel down her neck and she shivered at the pleasantness of it. Breathless, Regina purred "the next step in your magic lessons will be disrobing. It is done like this." Regina waved her hand and Emma was perfectly naked.

Emma looked down at her bared form and just smiled, she knew she had a body worth looking at, the more chatty of the maids were always telling her how they wished they had her soft flaxen hair, her long limbs, her smooth skin, her petite but perfectly shaped breasts or her almost elven face. But Regina wasn't looking at her face. She had taken a second's pause from touching and kissing to look the now naked Emma up and down with a look of impressed desire.

Suddenly Regina couldn't stand it anymore, she had to touch this woman, this incredible woman with her angelic face and her sinfully perfect body. Her experienced hands slid down a back sculpted by years of swordplay and covered in astonishingly smooth, pale skin before landing on a soft but muscled derriere. She felt Emma's legs touch against her own, the fine hairs on both women's legs brushing against each other. The room smelled of warm skin and fragrant, honeyed wetness. Everything around them disappeared and all Regina could see, feel, taste and hear was Emma. The world shrank to just them, just their touches, just their need for each other.

Regina grudgingly let go of Emma and moved back to take another look at the naked princess. "*Well now*, remind why I didn't have you naked in your very first lesson?"

Emma gave a smile which bordered between shy sweetness and wanton vanity. Her green eyes glistened with lust and she felt the warm buzzing between her legs escalate into obvious wetness. She ran her fingers over her own shoulder, down over her left breast and along the expanse of her stomach to finally rest in her blonde curls and answered "decorum?"

Regina laughed at the notion and Emma had to grin back. Regina laid her hand over the fingers resting in Emma's silky little curls and pushed them forward until they slipped between the wet folds. Then she brought Emma's fingers up to her mouth and licked and sucked them clean. Emma moaned at the treatment, forgetting to breathe when Regina's tongue slid over her sensitive fingertips, and before she could stop herself the words "please, more" slipped out of her mouth.

Regina nodded with dark eyes and pushed Emma roughly onto the bed and repeated her hand wave to undress herself. As she lowered herself onto Emma she hummed in pleasure at the feel of Emma's soft and slightly warmer skin meeting her own.

Regina's hands caressed what little of Emma's skin that wasn't covered by her own and whispered "tell me, have you ever been with a woman, Princess?"

Emma shook her head and mumbled "no, just a man. Just one man." She felt suddenly embarrassed by that fact and hoped that Regina wouldn't laugh or seem shocked at her inexperience.

"Then it's time for some more lessons, beautiful," Regina purred before ghosting her lips over Emma's and sliding her hand up the inside of Emma's thigh.

Emma felt Regina's tongue slide into her mouth at the same time as two of the brunette's fingers slid between much lower lips. Emma relaxed and let Regina all the way into her, knowing that she never wanted Regina to leave her body.

Seconds became minutes and minutes became hours and by the time the sun was in full zenith Emma had learned more lessons about how to please a female body than she had learned magic in the last week. Suddenly the meaning of life seemed to be soft curves, spicy wetness and full lips adorned with a scar whispering *Emma, yes*.

She woke up

Chapter Notes

Author's note: It's been a really crappy day so today's chapter will have to be short. Hopefully you all feel that a short chapter is better than none at all. Oh, and I'm sorry I am being slow with replying to reviews and comments lately, life keeps getting busier and busier. I'll get there, I promise!

She woke up and everything felt peculiar. Her body was humming with physical exhaustion despite her clearly having been asleep, she was hungry, her mouth was dry and tasted funny and she was laying on something odd. Something warm and soft that was *moving*. Her eyes flew open. Regina! She was laying on Regina's naked stomach! What they had done all streamed back into Emma's head and she felt lightheaded. That's when she noticed that the room was growing dark. How long had they been asleep? How much had they made love?and what was *that noise*?

She woke up and felt that something was off. She felt sore in *all the best places to be sore* but had a sense of impending doom. She felt a head on her abdomen and long blonde curls splayed out over her torso. The sense of impending doom soon cleared in her mind, it was a fear of feeling too content and too happy for this day to just to have been about sex. She pushed those thoughts away immediately. Emma was stirring, something had clearly woken them both. It was that infernal noise, that infernal knocking. *Ogre's balls, someone was at the door.*

The knocking rang out once more. "Emma, sweetheart? Are you in there?"

In the twilight dusk Emma and Regina stared at each other in panic. It was the king.

"Uh, um... Yes father. I was... um..." Emma stuttered in wild panic as she kept looking at Regina for a solution.

Charming sounded worried as he replied, "Emma? We have been looking for you. Are you alright? You sound a bit queer?"

Emma just kept staring at Regina. The brunette mimed the words *say you've had a headache and wanted to rest*.

Emma stared at her uncomprehendingly through the darkness and the feeling of panic.

Regina rolled her eyes and tried miming it again, slower this time.

"I-I had a headache but I wish you all the best!" Emma shouted and made Regina bury her face in her hands as she whispered "dammit, Emma. I said *wanted to rest*, not *wish you all the best*!"

Emma bit her lip and tried to keep herself from swearing at her own stupidity.

"Alright, that's it. You definitely don't sound well, sweetheart. I'm coming in!" Charming said and tried the door handle.

Emma once more stared big-eyed at Regina, pleading for a way to fix this. Regina was desperately looking around the room for a place to hide but then rolled her eyes at herself, she had magic for crying out loud! With a flick of her wrist she made herself vanish to her room just before the door opened and Charming entered the bedchamber.

He rushed in towards the bed and Emma hurried to pull the covers over herself to hide her nakedness.

"Father! I'm... I'm sorry if I gave you all a fright. I just didn't feel well after my magic lesson today so I went to bed and must have fallen asleep," Emma said, relieved that the lie came so easily.

Charming seemed to take a deep breath of relief and smiled. "That's alright. We just wondered where you were! When neither you nor Regina showed up for lunch, me and your mother went looking for you. Your mother said she knocked on your door but had no response, so she assumed you couldn't be in here."

"I must have been sleeping very deeply and not heard her. I'm sorry," Emma replied and hoped that her mother had been knocking when they slept and not in the middle of any *activities*.

Her father sat down on the edge of the bed. "It doesn't matter as long as you are alright," he said with a huge smile.

Suddenly Emma felt very aware of that she was stark naked and that the room smelled of sex. She felt very lucky that it was her rather clueless father who had come barging in and not her, slightly less, clueless mother.

Suddenly Charming frowned and Emma felt terrified that he was becoming suspicious.

"You know... I wonder where Regina is? I went looking for her to ask if you had said where you were going after your lesson, and see why she hadn't showed up for lunch, but I couldn't find her anywhere," he said with a knitted brow.

"Um, maybe she went for a walk?" Emma tried.

"From before lunch until six in the evening? That's one hell of a walk!" Charming retorted with a laugh.

"Yes, yes I suppose that would be odd," Emma said and chewed the inside of her cheek.

Charming stood up. "Anyway, are you feeling well enough to come down for dinner?"

Emma thought that Regina might be there and nodded. "Yes, let me just clean up a bit and I will be down. Start without me!"

He nodded, gave her another relieved smile and walked out.

Sadly Regina didn't show up for dinner. Snow said that she had finally found the brunette and that she had said that she had spent the afternoon out, getting to know the area and having lunch in the nearest village. She had gotten lost and therefore not returned to the castle until now. Emma took note of the lie, thinking that Regina certainly *did* have a lot to teach her.

They ate the delicious meal and chatted politely but Emma's thoughts were somewhere else. They were on top of golden skin, inside pink velvet and underneath deft hands. She kept blushing as memories of the day returned to her at the most inopportune moments. After a while her mother noticed her discomfort and sent Emma back to bed with a glass of warm, honeyed milk brought forth by a footman.

When Emma was alone in her room something odd happened. She had writing paper, ink and a quill lying on a table by the window and as she sat there, drinking her milk and staring longingly into space, the quill flew up and began to write on the paper.

Emma put the glass down and hurried over to the writing paper. When she got there she saw a brief message printed out in slanting, beautiful handwriting.

Dearest Princess,

*I will magic myself back to your room when everyone has gone to bed.
Please don't scream!*

R.

Emma smiled hugely to herself and felt her chest swell with pride and excitement. Regina was coming back. Soon.

The agreement

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Thank you for your kind words regarding me having a bad day yesterday, I honestly didn't write that to get pity, I just wanted to explain why the chapter was so short. Still, thank you for your sweet words and your patience! You are all so very lovely!

Emma spent the next few hours waiting impatiently in her room. She had tried to focus on reading by the light of her new beeswax candles, but her mind just kept losing track of the words and wondering when Regina would arrive. So instead she tried practicing stances and moves for swordplay while holding her quill as a makeshift sword, but she stopped that the second she caught sight of her own shadow and realised what a ridiculous figure she was striking.

Her third attempt to keep herself busy was arranging her clothes and hair to be perfect, but that didn't take nearly enough time. When that was all done she even went as far as trying to touch herself so that she could be nonchalant and calm when Regina arrived, not aching for Regina's touch like she was now. However, she abandoned that idea after a few seconds as she noticed that her little pleasure nub was still sore after the heavy exercise it had gotten that morning. Anyway, it just wasn't the same when it wasn't Regina's fingers.

Through all of it Emma threw glances around the room, knowing that Regina could magically poof herself into any part of the large bedchambers. Where would she arrive? And when?

Pacing back and forth in the empty bedchambers, Emma grinned at herself as she hoped that Regina would appear on her bed. Just the thought made her bite her lip and remember the feel of Regina's chilled, soft skin. How was it possible to want someone this much? Then she gave a little chuckle to herself as she realised that she would be just as happy if they only spent the night talking and holding each other. How was it possible to miss someone this much?

Emma stopped pacing as she realised that Regina didn't seem the type to sit around and talk all night, and even if she was... what could Emma possible say to such a worldly, experienced woman? Regina had seen and done so much in her long colourful life! What had Emma done with her 25 years of living? Fought with swords, failed to learn to crochet and spent meeting after meeting with young eligible princes who were terrified of her. What could she say that would interest Regina?

Emma was so lost in her thoughts that she clearly missed the purple smoke that displayed Regina's arrival, because when she heard the words "good evening, Princess" coming from the chair by her writing table she jumped.

"*Regina*," Emma breathed with her voice putting so much joy and relief into the name that it made them both start. Quickly Emma turned and saw the brunette sitting in the chair wearing nothing more than a lacy black corset. Emma's breathing turned more into panting now as she slowly realised that she might not have to worry about how to make conversation with Regina. Not yet anyway.

Regina sat there with a confident smile on her face and her slim, elegant legs crossed to hide the beauty between them. The corset was laced up at the front and as Emma watched, Regina waved her fingers and made the laces magically come undone. It looked like dancing to Emma as they slowly, teasingly wound themselves around each other until they were completely separated. Then the corset fell open, spilling out Regina's soft breasts from their tight confinement.

Emma wasn't sure if she was breathing at all anymore. Regina took in the look of total awe and desire on Emma's face and smirked while she slowly made it worse by uncrossing her legs and keeping them completely separated. All of Regina was now bared for Emma and the blonde froze in place for a moment. Only for a moment though, after that instinct took over and Emma rushed over to kneel between Regina's legs and lap up every drop of wetness her staring had caused between the brunette's legs.

Regina leaned her head back and gave a guttural humming noise of approval before starting to whisper instructions on how and where she wanted Emma's tongue in between muted moans.

When Emma began to flick the tip of her tongue over Regina's swollen, and still aching from over-use, clit it didn't take long for the sorceress to come gloriously on her tongue. Emma licked up as much of it as she could, cockily enjoying the proof of just how well she could satisfy this incredible woman.

Regina spasmed a little from the last throws of her climax and Emma half-stood to allow herself to hold Regina until the spasms died out. Regina smiled at the sweetness of the young woman and felt it pinch her heart. She was here on a mission after all. She was here to ensure that Emma knew that this was only about sex.

As soon as her breathing calmed Regina grabbed Emma's face and kissed her ferociously, showing the blonde that she was not here for tenderness. Emma kissed her back, matching the roughness and adding in her growing desire into the mix.

Regina placed her hands on Emma's chest, not able to feel the individual breasts under the hard corset but placing her palms in the right places nevertheless, and pushed the blonde towards her bed and then down onto it.

Emma grinned at the forcefulness, knowing very well that she was five times physically stronger than Regina and could easily wrestle the

brunette into submission if she wished. When Emma landed on the bed she sat up and whispered "is that anyway to treat royalty?"

Regina smirked. "Oh, Princess, if there is one thing I learned this morning it is that you don't mind some rough treatment. In fact, it makes you oh so slick between those long legs of yours."

Just as Emma was trying to come up with some flirty retort, Regina scorched all thoughts out of her mind by slowly kneeling between her legs, reversing their positions from earlier, and purring "but I can kneel and swear fealty if you like, Royal Highness? I think you would enjoy seeing me on my knees, Princess. It's not a sight many people get to see."

Emma panted, "stop calling me princess. Say my name. I like hearing it in your sexy voice."

Regina slid her hands up Emma's right leg, clipped open the garter and began to roll down Emma's knee-length white stocking. As she did, she kissed every inch of skin that was slowly revealed. When she had gone far enough to bare Emma's foot, she threw the stocking over her shoulder and cooed "I don't think that is such a good idea, Princess. I'm trying to limit the use of your name when we are being physical, saying your name while doing *this* is too intimate. I wish to keep the rules clear."

"Rules?" Emma queried while Regina started on the other stocking.

Regina stopped kissing just under Emma's knee and replied "yes, rules. That is my real reason to come here tonight, sweet thing. I didn't have time to discuss it all with you earlier today due to the King's untimely visit."

Emma reached out and cupped Regina's chin to draw the brunette's gaze into her own eyes. "What rules did you want to discuss?"

"Right to the core of the matter as always. I do so enjoy that about you, Princess," Regina said with a glittering smile.

Regina stopped the smile but kept her voice light as she said, "1. This is just physical. I do not fall in love anymore and you certainly shouldn't fall in love with someone like me. 2. Obviously anything that happens between us which is not connected to our studies has to be a secret. 3. I will implement sexual rewards and punishments into your training. I know from experience that there is no quicker way to learn magic than that particular incentive. These are my terms. Agree to them or I leave tomorrow."

Emma stared at the beautiful older woman, still cupping the feminine chin in her hand. Thoughts and emotions roiled inside her. She felt jealous at the implication that Regina had learned with sexual incentives with Maleficent. She felt wretched because Regina was right about that she shouldn't fall in love with someone like the low birth-sorceress in front of her... but most of all she felt heartbroken that Regina professed not to have any feelings for her. Was that really true?

Emma stared into those mahogany-brown eyes and tried to look for something, something she knew she had seen in fleeting moments before. A tenderness, an *interest* that wasn't purely sexual. Regina freed her chin from Emma's grasp and returned to removing the stocking and Emma felt the roiling cease instantly. Regina most certainly had stronger feelings than just arousal for her, why else did she just flinch and look away like that?

However, Emma was smart enough to know that if she let on that she knew this, Regina would go to great lengths to refute it, maybe even leave. So, keeping her satisfied smile hidden inside herself, Emma coolly replied, "alright. I agree to your terms."

Regina threw the other stocking over her shoulder to land with the first. "Good, I'm glad we are in agreement. Why don't we consummate our accord with me tipping the *Royal* velvet? Spread your legs, Princess, and *let me in*."

Emma spread her legs, bunched up the elaborate dress as well as she could around her hips and then laid back on the bed, waiting for

Regina's tongue to make her feel blissful again. The soreness, which had kept Emma from touching herself earlier, now just became an extra sexual spice as she felt the warm, eager tongue skilfully play in her folds. She closed her eyes and had only time for one more thought before pleasure overtook her, *I will make you admit that you love me one day and I will make sure you know I feel the same. You can't run from me, Regina Mills.*

Two hours later Regina had poofed back to her own bedchambers. She sat down and absentmindedly caressed the magically-created velvet covering her bed. Her mind was whirring. The evening hadn't gone as she had expected. Well, the physical bit had been just what she had expected it to be – amazing. Despite a morning of exploring and taking each other they were both as hungry for it this evening and it had been all fireworks and fun.

No, the bit that hadn't gone to plan was Emma's reaction to her terms. Obviously Regina was grateful that Emma had just agreed without any fuss, but she couldn't help wonder why it was so easy for Emma to go along with the agreement. Had the blonde not felt anything more than desire for her? That would be a relief in some ways but it also made Regina feel strangely... wounded.

She shook the emotion off best as she could but it still lingered at the back of her mind as she used her magic to clean herself off and get ready for sleep.

She crawled under the covers and thought about when she left Emma for the night. After two orgasms each, Regina has said it was enough and that they should try and get some sleep. Emma had argued that they had slept all afternoon and could have a few more throws of passion, *her expression not Regina's*, but the blonde hadn't stood her ground when Regina had persisted in leaving. Still... there had been a definite look of sadness in those sea-green eyes when they kissed goodnight. Wasn't that proof that Emma felt something deeper? Or was it just a sex-starved Princess not wanting to lose her new toy for the next few hours?

Angry at herself, Regina squeezed her eyes shut and repeated a mantra in her head.

It's good that Emma hasn't fallen in love with me.

It's good that Emma hasn't fallen in love with me.

It's good that Emma hasn't fallen in love with me.

It.... hurts quite a bit that Emma hasn't fallen in love with me.

Bedroom companion?

Emma woke up and stretched. There was a bittersweet pleasure in the realisation that the bed still smelled a bit like Regina, well at least *a certain part* of Regina. Emma had no idea how she would get the older woman to allow them to fall in love with each other properly. There were obstacles in the way even if you ignored the fact that Regina clearly didn't want to fall in love.

Emma laid back and counted the reasons on her fingers. There was the detail that she was expected to marry a prince and form an alliance with another kingdom. Then there was the fact that her own kingdom would probably rebel if they were ruled by *two* people with magic, even just the one sorceress would be hard for them to stomach despite their love for her. Then there was the gender thing, obviously it wasn't unusual for royalty to take lovers of their own sex, but to marry them and rule beside them... that was a different thing. Then there was her mother, what would Snow say if her darling little daughter married her childhood hero and nearly step-mother, wouldn't that disturb both her parents?

Emma stopped counting reasons and closed her eyes, remembering the way Regina's laugh had echoed in the quiet bedroom as she unintentionally tickled the brunette's stomach with her hair. She remembered putting her hand over those full, kiss-sore lips and whispering "not so loud, they'll hear us" with the biggest grin in the world. That laugh, that laugh was deep and raspy but yet so melodious. Emma could have listened to it all night.

She opened her eyes and wondered if she should ring for the maids to come get her ready for the day, she clearly wasn't going back to sleep and after yesterday's exercise she found herself incredibly hungry. However, before she had time to ring for anyone she got distracted by a huge black spider crawling along her wall. It stopped in a corner just

as she stared at it and Emma frowned at the creature and muttered "I was hoping to wake up with my stunning instructor, not with you." The spider stayed where it was and Emma just shook her head at it and rang for the maids.

Later that morning Emma walked into the room dedicated for her studies and found Regina already in it. The brunette turned at the sound of the door and gave Emma a conspiring smile. Emma felt that smile raise her body temperature by a few degrees and gave a dopey smile back.

Regina's smile faded slowly, she clasped her hands and then started the lesson. "Well, you have succeeded in transporting objects, levitating them and even creating them from scratch. Now I want you to combine all three. Create something, which isn't an apple this time, levitate it in mid-air and then transport it to a location of your choosing."

"Oh, alright," Emma replied with a feeling of dread brewing inside herself. She desperately tried to think of something that she could create which could impress Regina. Or at least make her smile again.

It was an item far too complicated to create that entered her head, but it seemed to be the only one coming to her and she knew that if she dallied any longer Regina would snipe at her for taking too long. She decided to go for a smaller part of the item, she was a novice after all.

Emma closed her eyes, held out her hands and used her love for her parents to tap into her magic. Then she tried to guess at the material involved in her chosen object. As soon as she had made a guess she thought about how it was created. She thought about the flax plant which she only vaguely knew what it looked like, she thought about somehow cleaning and separating the fibres, she visualised someone spinning it into fabric, dying it black and then sewing the edges so there would be no fraying. She thought about the feel and weight of the finished product and suddenly felt something appear in her hands. She opened her eyes and stared at the long black laces laying curled up in her palms.

Regina walked over to her, heels clicking on the floor as she slowly approached. She picked up the black laces and looked at Emma in puzzlement. Emma gave an almost shy but still cheeky smirk and said "they are meant to be the laces from your corset last night. I don't know what they are made of but I guessed linen?"

Regina laughed and the sound felt like victory to Emma. She had done it! She made her laugh!

"Clever girl," Regina said with a subtle wink. Then she placed the laces back in Emma's still outstretched hands, making sure her fingertips brushed against the soft skin of Emma's lilywhite palms.

Then she walked back to her original position and said "now make them float like you did the apple."

Emma just grinned at her.

Regina raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Well, you did say that there would be rewards and punishments," Emma answered, with that same shy but flirty smile which clearly worked on the older woman.

Regina crossed her arms over her chest. "Oh I see. Fine, make them levitate while I count to three and you may kiss me."

Emma bit her lower lip and nodded. She closed her eyes and focused hard on the laces, then she imagined them moving. She felt them leave her palms and smiled, but she had celebrated too soon because the second she smiled the laces came tumbling back down into her hands.

Regina cooed "oh, did someone get cocky? I'll let you have that one. Next time you fail you will receive a punishment."

Without moving her hands or opening her eyes Emma asked "what kind of punishment?"

"Whatever I deem suitable. It can be a pinch on the arm, having to tell me an embarrassing secret, a few slaps on your soft little bottom or I can deny you something, like your farewell kiss after the lesson ends for example," Regina drawled.

Emma felt her heart pound hard. She was supposed to get a farewell kiss? She might get spanked if she failed? There was plenty of bad news in Regina's statement but Emma's happy, love-stunned heart only saw the positive.

"Stop smiling like that, Princess. Focus or you have no chance of getting neither your victory kiss nor that farewell kiss," Regina said seriously.

Emma nodded and squeezed her eyes shut even tighter. She tapped into her magic and focused on the laces once more and felt them leave her hands. As soon as they were in the air Regina began to slowly count. "1...2...3... well done, Princess!"

The laces barely had time to fall back into her hands before Emma opened her eyes and asked "kiss?" A voice in the blonde's brain was berating her for her behaviour. She was a grown woman and an heir to the throne! She should be dignified and strong, not a soppy young wench begging for a kiss from an older paramour.

Regina smiled at her, but this wasn't one of her normal haughty and superior smiles, it was a smile that came from the heart and Emma saw that fleeting glance in Regina's eyes again. The blonde's heart skipped a beat as she thought to herself, *now that is infatuation, even I know that.*

Regina walked over to her and held out her hands to cup the blonde's face. Then she pulled Emma in for a kiss and it made Emma feel like she just had the best night's sleep, bested a skilled knight at swordplay and had a brilliant meal all pressed into one feeling of joy and achievement. She pushed her luck by pulling Regina close to her and letting her hands travel up and down the brunette's back, the black

laces falling from her hands to the floor. She felt Regina's corseted bust collide with her own and longed to get them both undressed.

Regina pulled away, not an easy feat considering how tight Emma was holding her. "No, no, no. A kiss was all you won. You'll have to do a lot more to get to keep touching me like that."

Emma's face fell. "You mean I will have to earn every physical contact with you?"

Regina dipped her head in affirmation and explained "yes, well everything but the farewell kiss, which stands unless you forfeit it by making grave mistakes. If you do well and work hard in your lesson you will receive a visit from me in your bedchamber before you sleep. If you don't... well, you'll have to go back to whatever you did to make yourself fall asleep before I arrived."

Emma felt an itching need to ask why the farewell kiss was a standing ritual considering they always had the mid-day meal with her parents after the lesson and so did not actually *say farewell*, but something in her pointed out that maybe that kiss was for Regina's own benefit and not hers and that it would be unwise to bring it up.

Regina adjusted her dress which must have moved slightly during the kiss, not that Emma could spot any difference.

Regina arranged her features to look like the severe tutor she was meant to be once more. "Right, next step is vanishing the item and making it reappear somewhere else. With the apple you moved it from my hands to yours. Now I suggest you try something more challenging. A little more distance perhaps? Move the laces somewhere further away."

Emma took a deep breath and nodded. She bent down to pick up the laces and then repeated the tap-into-magic-close-eyes-and-hold-out-hands routine. The kiss still played on her mind, the feel of Regina's soft lips pressed against her own and even gently nipping at her pink lower lip with her red ones. She felt a buzzing in her sex and tried to

ignore it and focus on getting the laces to vanish and appear on the bookshelf behind her. However, images of kissing and more intimate activities crowded her mind and so she was quite surprised when she felt the laces disappear. She opened her eyes with a sense of victory at having done it, but when she turned to the bookshelf the laces weren't there.

Emma stared at the particular shelf she had envisioned and stammered "b-but I was thinking about that shelf."

Regina resisted the urge to run her hand over her face in frustration and calmed her voice before saying, "I see, and where did you *accidentally* think of?"

Emma felt her cheeks grow hot and probably red as blood. "Um. My bed?"

Regina tried so very hard to keep from laughing but in the end she couldn't stifle a small chuckle. "Well I supposed I am partly to blame for that. After all, I am the one who seduced you and brought sexual incentives into your training, I shouldn't blame you for having sex on your mind during your studies. However, you have to learn to focus! It's time for your first punishment. Come here."

Emma didn't know what to say and just slowly shuffled over to her instructor. Regina reached out and took Emma's hand, she lifted it up with her left hand and gave it a hard smack with her right. It stung but Emma didn't make a sound or even flinch, if it hadn't been for the rapid blinking and the instant clench of the blonde's elegant jaw Regina would have thought that she hadn't hit hard enough.

Regina kept Emma's hand in her own and tenderly mumbled "good, you are clearly brave when it comes to pain." Then she softly kissed where she had slapped the hand and continued, "I am going to transport us to your bedchamber and we are going to look for those laces and when, or if, we find them you will have to transport them to that shelf. Understood?"

Emma nodded and oh so softly squeezed Regina's hand. Regina decided to ignore the squeeze which she was classifying as a gesture of tenderness. She also decided to ignore the kiss she had given the blonde's hand to lessen the sting. Regina knew she should be stricter but it was so hard when Emma had that kicked puppy look plastered on her beautiful features.

Soon they appeared in Emma's bedchambers and Regina let go of her hand. They both spotted the laces on the bed and Emma hurried over to retrieve them. As Regina waited she looked around the room and spotted the huge spider still lurking in a corner. When Emma turned back with the laces she caught Regina staring at the creature.

"Yes, not a very nice bedroom companion. I forgot to ask the maids to get rid of it," Emma said conversationally.

"You mean it was here this morning?! Was that the first time you saw it? Was it here yesterday?" Regina asked with her voice strained in something near to panic.

Emma looked at her in bewilderment. "Don't tell me you are frightened of it? It might be a bit on the large side, but it's still only an innocent, common spider."

Regina shook her head but kept her gaze fixed on the spider. "No Princess, that is most certainly not just an innocent, common spider."

A spider and a gryphon

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Sorry about the cliffhanger in the last chapter! As always I am very grateful for anyone reading, reviewing and recommending this fic to others. If you want to chat about this story or anything else, you can find me on Tumblr under violetscentedwriter , on Facebook where I'm called Violet Scented or on Twitter where I'm VioletscentedSQ . Come say hello!

Still trying to figure out Regina's words, Emma just stared at the brunette before asking "what do you mean that is *most certainly not just an innocent, common spider*? What else would it be? There are no poisonous spiders in our kingdom."

Regina still didn't take her eyes off the spider, but she reached out a hand and made the small creature levitate towards them. In her other hand an opened glass box appeared and soon the spider helplessly floated into it.

Regina closed the lid and muttered "it might not have poison or venom but it is dangerous in another way. It has been magically interfered with. I sensed it as soon as I saw the creature. If I am reading this enchantment correctly, and I usually am, this spider relays everything it hears and sees to whomever enchanted it."

Then Regina waved her hand over the glass box, sealing it with a red glow. "There, now it cannot hear or see us anymore."

Emma looked furious. "I was naked in front of that thing this morning!"

Regina looked pitying at her but then, deciding on the best way to make Emma feel better about the situation, broke out in a feral grin as she said "well now, this is the first time I have ever envied a spider."

Emma's fury dissipated somewhat at that but she still felt wronged and strangely ashamed. She looked back at the spider in the glass box. "Could you sense who enchanted it?"

"No, not exactly, not yet anyway. But it felt like it was someone with more limited magic than my own. Which rules out Maleficent and Rumplestiltskin, I'm glad to say", Regina replied as she too examined the black spider crawling around manically in its box.

Emma crossed her arms over her chest, partly in defiance against this devious trick and partly to comfort herself. She knew that Regina wasn't very worried about showing off her body, but Emma had only ever showed hers to her maids and her two lovers. Other than that she had been taught to keep her body a treasured secret. That in combination with the uncomfortable notion that someone was spying on her made her feel strangely... violated. Trying to distract herself from her uneasiness she asked "can you find out who it was?"

Regina nodded, still looking at the creature. "Yes, I believe I can."

After that she turned back to Emma to say that she would need to cancel the rest of their lesson, but as she looked at Emma she saw the younger woman's distress. Emma was clearly trying to hide it and present her usual strong, capable persona, but her body language showed her discomfort and this made Regina feel that unwelcome tug at her heart again. For a few beats she considered ignoring it and getting on with examining the spider, that was after all what she would have done if it was anyone else standing opposite her now. But it was *Emma*. Damn that woman and her heart-piercing green eyes!

Regina put the box down on a nearby table and walked over to Emma, almost awkwardly enveloping the woman in a hug and then blatantly lying as she said "spiders have limited eyesight, no doubt it was placed her by an enemy wanting to *overhear* any plans. They probably didn't even care to look at your body. Which, quite frankly is their loss."

Emma nestled into the embrace, knowing that this was a rare gift from her tutor and yet another sign that the older woman *did* care for her. She breathed in the scent of Regina's skin and placed a chaste kiss on the brunette's neck before saying "I'm sure you're right."

The princess then stepped back, squared her shoulders and mentally pulled herself together. "I confess that I don't understand who enchanted and sent it? I would say Swordsbane but..."

"...but they despise magic, yes. However, remember that they were willing to use your magic to stop magic as a whole. If they have gotten their hands on another magic-wielder and are using them, it must mean they are growing tired of waiting for a time to strike, they are trying to *create* a way instead. IF it indeed IS Swordsbane that is, but I am willing to bet that it is. This sort of sneaky cowardice has Queen Desiree written all over it", Regina snarled bitterly.

Emma looked appalled at Regina. "I think you are missing the big picture here, if King Robert and Queen Desiree have a magic-wielder held captive, it means that we should have stopped them before. Who knows what they might be doing to the poor sorceress or sorcerer they are using!"

Regina looked determined. "All the more reason to strike now. I was a fool to wait, I was too worried about that powder King Robert has. Now that I know how much unused magic you have, however, I can just bring you. Then if he takes my magic I can connect to you and use yours instead!"

Emma eyes darkened and she clenched her jaw. "So we are back to you using me?"

Regina smiled dangerously and replied "no, dear. We are back to us working together to kill them, to tear the flesh from their very bones."

Emma looked disgusted at the tone of murderous glee mixed with fury in Regina's voice. She weighed her words for a second before saying, "we are back to you thinking that the solution to everything is a bloodbath. Power has to be used for good."

Regina suddenly looked slightly bored, but it was a look meant to cover up the fact that she felt uncomfortable at Emma's disappointment. "Oh my, you really are your mother's daughter, aren't you?"

Emma moved close to Regina, facing her dead on and stated clearly, "yes, and proud of it!"

Regina looked like she was about to bite, but then she forced herself to calm down and merely said, "well, let's leave this discussion until we know for sure that Swordsbane is behind this. I was going to cancel your lesson, but then having you watch me trace the magic in this ugly little creature might be a good a lesson as any."

Emma stood up straight. "Alright, but I think my parents should be there."

Regina snarled her beautiful lips into an angry grimace. "Princess, they'll only slow us down and make things complicated."

Emma banged her fist on the table, making the glass box with the spider jolt. "This is their kingdom and they deserve to know that their daughter and maybe even their people are in danger! Besides, they have contacts all over the realm that could be of use and experience of war. I kept your secret but now this is escalating. We need to tell them what you overheard and we need to tell them about this spider!"

Regina sighed deeply but drawled, "fine, just as long as they don't get in my way. Go fetch them and we will all meet in the study room."

The glass box containing the spider was now sitting in the middle of the desk. Regina was standing over it and behind her were Emma, Snow and Charming. Emma's parents had been told the whole story and when their resentment at being kept in the dark had subsided they had agreed to come to see the spider be examined. The room was dead silent.

Suddenly, mumbling strange words under her breath, Regina made the glass glow red with magic and then the lid opened. The spider was absolutely still inside and for a moment Emma wondered if Regina had killed it. The brunette grew silent and picked up the spider gently, placing it in the palm of her hand and cupping her other hand on top. Then she closed her eyes and stood still like that for a while. The tense seconds beat out infinitely slow and from the corner of her eye Emma could see her mother move into the embrace of her husband's strong arms and share a worried glance with him.

Regina began to speak, her voice strangely monotonous as if she was speaking while her mind was really busy with something else.

"The magic signature coming off this creature is from a sorcerer or sorceress who is weak, but not young. I can feel a dankness and gloom from where the enchanter is being kept. I see flashes of stone walls and metal chains. There is a wooden door with metal bars at the top, I think I can see a crest carved into the middle of the door. It... seems to be a gryphon with something in its claws, perhaps a sword?"

"The crest of Swordsbane is a Gryphon breaking a sword with its claws," Charming mumbled with anger in his tone.

Regina continued as if no one had spoken. "The enchanter seems to be a woman, she is weak and tired. Perhaps injured? She emanates helplessness and dejection. That is all I can sense."

They saw Regina place the spider back in the glass box, wave her hand over it to seal with crimson-lit magic again and then speak in her normal voice. "So, your Majesties, are we certain of who our enemy is?"

As in one voice Charming, Snow and Emma replied "Swordsbane."

Regina gave a low chuckle and replied "well of course. The real question is if they know that *we know*?"

Laps and hearts

Chapter Notes

Author's note: I just needed to let you all know that there won't be a new chapter of this story until Monday. I simply won't have time to write any chapters for the next two days. I'm sorry about that but I'm sure you have all waited longer than that for an update to a fic. ;) Thank you for your understanding and have a great weekend!

Snow and Charming had rushed off to assemble a war council and plan their next move. Emma had noticed that Regina made no move to come along so she had told her parents to start the meeting without them.

"Aren't you coming to the war council? Your input would be invaluable," Emma said with a frown and a tentative hand on Regina's upper arm.

"No. Their indecision and wish to spare everyone's life no matter the cost would no doubt infuriate me and I'd end up saying something I'd live to regret. I will stay here and think about my own options. Do let me know what they decide on, though," the brunette said as she watched the spider crawling around in its glass box.

Emma felt her anger rise. Why did this woman have to be so infuriating?!

Emma tightened her hold on Regina's upper arm slightly and said "you can't say what they are going to decide, and besides, you should be

there to help plan our counter move! You can't just rush off and do whatever you please, Regina!"

Regina's head snapped back to Emma so fast that it made the blonde flinch.

In a tone of icy rage Regina replied "actually, I think you'll find I can! I am not a subject of this kingdom, I am just *visiting* for a while."

Emma wanted to argue that if Regina was *living here* and *working here* she was a subject for the time being, she also wanted to shout about how any plan against Swordsbane would have a much bigger chance of succeeding with Regina's involvement. However, once again she had the inkling that Regina was not a woman to push and coerce. She had to be presented with the options and gently nudged in the right direction. The problem was that gentle nudging wasn't Emma's strong suit, she was much better at the sledgehammer approach.

She decided to leave it for a while and return to the subject when they were both calmer.

"Fine, I'll stay here with you then. We can discuss a magical approach and I promise not to spill your *secret schemes* to anyone. Acceptable?" Emma asked in a biting tone and sat down on the chair by the desk.

Regina looked her over with a nonchalant air and drawled "you can stay wherever you wish, Princess. It is your castle."

Emma hated the distance she could feel between them now. Damn Swordsbane! Damn Regina's stubborn lone wolf approach to things. Right now Emma wanted nothing more than to pull Regina over to sit in her lap. She laughed at the thought of it, knowing that Regina would find that not only presumptuous but also beneath her dignity.

Clearly she had laughed out loud because Regina asked "what is so amusing?"

Emma shrugged but still replied "you honestly wish to know? I was daydreaming about pulling you over to sit on my lap."

Regina gave a chuckle and a wry smile. "Really? And did you also daydream about how I might slap your face if you tried it?"

"Absolutely, " Emma said with another laugh.

Regina waved her hand and a jade-green, plush armchair appeared. Regina sat down in it gracefully and looked at the taller woman with a challenging gaze as she said "why don't *you* sit in *my* lap, Princess?"

Emma watched the brunette pat her lap invitingly and knew that Regina expected her to balk at this, but Emma certainly didn't mind if it meant being close to the stunning older woman. She got up from her hard chair and nearly launched herself unto Regina's lap.

The brunette laughed, put her arms around Emma's thin waist and joked that Emma nearly killed her with her impact. The princess didn't have time to think about her following actions, she was in Regina's arms and the charismatic woman was smiling affectionately at her, so she leaned in and kissed those smiling, burgundy-painted lips.

After a couple of seconds Regina broke away from the kiss and dazedly mumbled, "I don't remember you doing anything which was deserving of a kiss?"

"Think of it as that farewell kiss I missed." Emma put her hand on the back of Regina's neck, feeling the fine, dark little hairs there, and brought the brunette's mouth to her own again.

They kissed for mere seconds before Emma felt Regina's tongue lapping at her lips to get access. Emma opened her mouth and heard Regina moan into the kiss as her tongue entered into the soft warmth. They kissed frenziedly now and Emma felt that pull in her lower abdomen followed by light-headedness. She was getting dangerously aroused and knew that she would be touching Regina soon if they didn't stop.

Emma moved away and panted with desire, "we better stop there or I will take you to bed."

Regina gave a devilish smile and purred "well, if we are on the eve of war here we better get all the lovemaking we can. We wouldn't even need a bed.... I can be very quick and discreet if I have to, *Princess*."

Emma felt the purr of that low, rich voice reverberate through her body and tense her already hardened nipples.

"No," she breathed in a whine, "we can't. They could be back any second."

"Fine," Regina stated in a clipped way. "But we better find something to talk about or I will do fiendish things to your pretty little body right here in this chair."

Emma felt that pull in her lower abdomen again and knew that she must be getting wet. She needed a conversation point right now or she would be letting Regina in under her dress.

As she thought about it she nuzzled Regina's neck and felt her instructor grab at her hip and pull Emma further up as the blonde was sliding down on Regina's petite lap.

"We should talk about Swordsbane," Emma said and *almost* managed to disguise the aroused panting still in her voice.

Regina kept her hand possessively on Emma's hip and replied "yes, we could do that. But if we did we would just end up fighting again. Besides, we are going to be talking about little else for the foreseeable future. Would you not like to discuss something a little lighter for this stolen moment?"

Emma nodded and then kissed Regina's ear, feeling the brunette draw in breath rapidly at the touch of the lips on her sensitive ear. Emma smiled and made a mental note of that Regina liked her ears kissed.

"Tell me more about Maleficent," Emma finally said.

Regina peered at her and kissed the little dimple in Emma's chin before replying, "are you sure you want to know? You won't get jealous?"

Emma gave a low chuckle and thought that Regina clearly read her better than she knew. "I probably will, yes. But I'm curious. You said that you brought out darkness in each other and from what I have seen, you do seem to resort to attacking harshly whenever faced with a problem."

Regina pursed her lips and then slowly dipped her head in acknowledgement. "Yes, well, that is not simply Mal's fault. I'm sure that some of my rage was always dormant in my blood. Then of course there is the fact that I was *raised* with a large modicum of darkness. My mother had magic, as I might have mentioned, and she used it to control me and my father. She said that magic was power but when I grew up all I knew was that magic was... cruel. It punished me and it caged me, everything to ensure I was an obedient little daughter. It shouldn't be surprising that I... became what I am."

Emma nuzzled into her neck again and kissed the pulse point she found there before mumbling "what *you are* is quite incredible and exceedingly alluring."

Regina huffed slightly but gave a tiny smile too. Then she continued her train of thought.

"No, Mal didn't cause my darkness in any way. But she and I did bring it out in each other, especially when she taught me magic considering that we both had *dark* magic, which is triggered by so called negative emotions. Her magic was always slightly different than mine though as she was part dragon. I had to find my own niche, and with lots of books and experimenting I focused on creating fire, Mal could obviously help me with that, and... the taking of people's hearts."

Emma tried not to sound too appalled. "The taking of hearts?"

"Yes. If you have someone's heart you can control their mind, speak for them, hurt them and even kill them. I used to do a lot more killing and hurting than I do now, through the years I have evolved to only hurt those who deserve it. I mostly use the heart-technique for mind control these days."

Emma swallowed and tried to keep her voice from betraying her aversion to how easily Regina talked about ripping someone's heart out. "So... how does the mind-control work? I mean, I know its magic, I meant the actual technique behind it."

Regina finally looked a little bothered by the conversation but she kept her head high and replied, "I control them with my thoughts while I have the heart in my hand. If I wish for the person I am controlling to say certain words, I take the heart and speak into it, thus making the person say exactly those words."

Emma looked puzzled. "You talk into the heart?"

Regina nodded and used the hand that wasn't on Emma's hip to caress the blonde's waist and stomach in absentminded way.

Emma knitted her brows as she thought about that odd concept. "So... what would happen if you licked it?"

Regina laughed and burst out an incredulous "*what?!*"

"If you licked the heart? What would happen? Would the controlled person start licking the air or would they feel their heart being licked?" Emma asked seriously.

Regina beamed at her and muttered "you ask the strangest questions, Princess."

"Well, I am supposed to learn magic. I should ask questions!" Emma retorted defensively.

Regina smirked and kissed the tip of Emma's slightly upturned nose before answering "indeed. Tell you what, if we are both alive and in the same castle after this debacle with Swordsbane I will gently extricate your heart and lick it and we will find out."

Emma considered this. "Yes, that sounds interesting. But couldn't you teach me to take out your heart and I could lick that?"

Regina looked pained as she wondered how she could tell Emma that she didn't wish to do that because she didn't want to show the pure-hearted princess how dark her heart had become after a lifetime of bad deeds and abuse of power. Luckily she was spared that discussion as they could hear quick footsteps coming down the hall.

Emma jumped up and Regina stood as well, vanishing the armchair with one simple move. Soon Snow entered the room and looked at the two women with unexpected severity in her eyes "you two, come into the war council now! We need to know the magical side to this!"

To Emma's great surprise Regina just sighed and strode after Snow in dignified steps, overtaking the woman halfway through the corridor and entering the war room before the Queen and Princess had time to catch up. It was time for decisions.

Before the attack

The war council continued after Regina, Snow and Emma burst into the room. After much shouting and mumbling it was a unanimous decision to attack Swordsbane. Whatever forces could be rallied or brought in from other kingdoms were to be set against King Robert and Queen Desiree. An argument between King James and Regina regarding timing ensued but it was agreed that *as soon as possible* was the best they could do.

The final plan was that a surprise attack would be launched by their makeshift army and it would keep Swordsbane's royal guards and knights busy while Emma and Regina snuck into the castle, freed the captured sorceress and tried to subdue Robert, Desiree and their two sons.

Emma groaned, "there's two of them? I thought it was just Jacob?"

Red, who as usual was one of the more vocal participants of the war council, shook her head. "No, I'm afraid that Robert and Desiree Foxcote believed in the royal adage of *an heir and a spare*. I can come with you in if you want a little extra muscle power?"

Regina looked at the slim, lanky, middle-aged woman and scoffed.

Emma helpfully pretend-coughed and inserted the word *werewolf* into the cough, making Regina's look of disdain switch to one of impressed interest.

Regina replied "actually, it might be a good idea. If Robert still has some of that magic-stopping powder we might be relying on my wits and Emma's sword and against Robert, Desiree, the two royal brats and possibly the chained sorceress if she attacks... well, it would be an uncomfortable fight."

"Uncomfortable is one way of putting it," Emma muttered.

Regina ignored Emma's comment and continued. "The main issue with this lovely plan is however that I need to know what the place I am magically transporting us into looks like. If not, I might make us appear inside a wall or the commode closet."

Snow spoke up. "Emma has been inside the castle, can't she do it?"

Regina gave her a surprisingly kind smile and said "sadly not, Emma's powers are too unpredictable and she doesn't know the technique. It takes many years of practice, I'm afraid."

Emma was looking down at the ground, her brain whirring away. "What about if you scope the castle out in crow form? If you fly around looking into windows and arrowslits you might not just get a good inkling of where we can transport too, you might also find out where exactly the sorceress is being held and where the Foxcote family are?"

Regina dipped her head in acknowledgement and gave Emma an impressed smile. "Not a bad idea, Princess."

Snow looked at the way Regina was smiling at Emma and the way her daughter blushed and grinned and thought *oh no, it has happened*.

"Good! That is settled then, " Charming said and swiftly sent a messenger to issue letters to nearby allies asking for troops immediately. Then he began to discuss the attack plans and the layout of the castle with the commander of the royal guards. Soon both men got confused regarding the castle's new reinforced portcullis and Snow dragged her attention away from her worry about Emma and Regina to help them.

Red got up from her seat and walked up to Emma and Regina. She looked stern and determined as she said "I will stay with you during the attack then. I have been in quite a few wars through the years and know my way around a fight. I will be in wolf shape though so the

planning and stealth will have to be all up to you two. Just tell me who to pounce on or what door to break down when the time comes."

Smilingly Regina eyed the beautiful woman up and drawled "I suddenly feel so much... safer."

Emma glared at her as she said "I don't think the two of you have been formally introduced. Red, this is Regina Mills, my tutor in the art of magic. Regina, this is Red Lucas, *my godmother* and my *mother's best friend*."

Regina took the hint and stopped looking at Red as if she was a particularly interesting dessert while Red merely said "Snow has told me all about you. Or at least all about the girl she used to know. I'm glad you are here to help us with this."

Regina gave a tiny theatrical bow and said "Robert and Desiree are my enemies as well. They took my business and with that, my home. Even if they weren't a threat to magic-wielders everywhere and in particular the beautiful one next me, I would wish to teach them a lesson."

Red's eyebrows shoot up when Regina described Emma as beautiful and she looked at the blonde princess who was busy blushing once more. For a moment Red was about to go into protective wolf-mother mode but when she saw the love-struck smile on Emma's face as she glanced at Regina she felt her heart give a warm thud. The lonely princess was finally in love. *I'll have to investigate this relationship further*, she thought as she watched the two sorceresses listening to Charming, Snow and the commander plan the attack.

Suddenly Regina looked over at Emma. "Well, if they are going to take a day or two to get the neighbouring allies to send reinforcements and to plan the attack, we might as well hone your magic skills. You might need them more than you do your sword."

Worriedly, Emma clenched her jaw and nodded.

An hour later they had turned their study room into a practice room and had started to use it. Regina was standing behind Emma and holding the blonde's hands out while trying to get the princess to shoot a volley of magic towards a practice dummy placed in the middle of the room. So far it wasn't working.

"Focus, Emma! Tap into your magic and then channel the magic through your hands. Pretend you are attacking someone dangerous, pretend you are attacking *King Robert*."

"I am! But it's not working!" Emma snarled.

Regina let go of her and backed away with a sigh. "Alright, let us try another approach. When you fight with a sword, what do you do?"

Emma shrugged. "I remember the correct techniques and stances and then my body and reflexes takes over and does the rest. I have practised with a sword since I was young, it comes naturally."

Regina frowned and placed her hands on her hips. "Fine. What about when you face someone who has the same amount of technique and skill as you? What do you do to get the upper hand?"

"I... I envision a scenario where I *have* to beat them," Emma said and looked slightly embarrassed.

Regina looked suddenly hopeful again. "Good! That's a start. What sort of scenarios do you envision?"

Emma crossed her arms over her chest and looked down. "Um, well, sometimes I pretend that it is a competition or a tournament. I usually do quite well in those situations, or at least that is what the trophies in my trophy room would tell you."

Regina smirked and suddenly regretted having turned down watching Emma spar. Perhaps the pretty princess would be rather *delicious* as a triumphant knight?

Regina tapped a finger against her painted lips as she thought about that. "That might work but I think we need something a little stronger than competitive spirit. What else do you envision while fighting?"

Emma sighed. "You'll mock me."

Regina quirked an eyebrow and drawled "well, yes I'm sure I will, dear. But then I always do, so you might as well tell me."

Emma shrugged dejectedly and muttered "I pretend that I am defending someone I love. Like my parents or... a lover."

Regina smirked again, this time hugely, and Emma glared at her for it.

To take the edge off her smirk Regina leaned in and kissed the blonde. Emma stared at her confusedly as their lips parted. "What's this? I get a kiss without having deserved it?"

"Perhaps it was a reward for your honesty, Princess. Now, let's get back to practising. We now have something to work with. Clearly you need to envision protecting someone and that unruly magic of yours should behave," Regina said and once again positioned herself behind Emma. She put her arms around the younger woman and grabbed her arms to hold them out in an offence position.

Then she leaned in and whispered in Emma's ear. "Close your eyes, Princess. Now imagine that King Robert is in front of you. He has used that infernal powder on me and has me by the throat. He's throttling me and you can see me turning pale and blue from lack of air, my hands pointlessly trying to push him away and my eyes turning to you for help. Attack him!"

Emma didn't think or try to tap into her magic, she just reacted to Regina's painted picture and felt her magic rush in her veins, then it flowed through her arms and hands until it finally streamed out of her fingertips.

She didn't dare to open her eyes in case the magic was just fizzling pointlessly at her fingertips but as soon as she heard Regina proudly purr "*very good*, Princess" in her ear she knew that she had gotten it right. She opened her eyes and saw huge amounts of white light flooding from her hands out towards the dummy which was ablaze in strange white fire.

Breathing hard, Emma brought her hands down and turned to push Regina up against the wall behind them. Her body was filled with adrenaline at her triumph but also the realisation of how angry anyone hurting Regina had made her. She attacked Regina with kisses and touches, her love suddenly too strong to subdue.

Regina moaned with pleasure as she felt Emma all over her body and tried to make herself stop the younger woman. They needed to practice, they needed to be in control of themselves and most of all... Regina needed to not want to give everything she had and everything she was to the woman licking the rim of her ear.

"Emma, stop," she panted weakly.

The princess pulled away immediately but Regina could see equal amounts of magic and desire in the green eyes meeting hers. The air between them seemed to be sizzling. Words of love were hiding just behind both women's lips and they both knew it as they gazed longingly at each other. Regina felt her heart and sex both throb for Emma and almost whimpered as she pushed the blonde away.

"No, we have to practice. We have to... not do that," Regina mumbled as she heard the blood thud in her ears. Trying to keep her feelings at bay, both the sexual and the romantic, was making her dizzy.

Seeing Regina's weakness almost startled Emma and instantly made her want to be the strong one. She would take the helm. She nodded her understanding to Regina and mumbled an apology. Then she stood back, rearranged the bodice of her dress and looked back at the dummy which was still lit with magical fire.

Regina straightened up, took a deep breath and cleared her throat before saying. "Right. Yes. Now fire another volley and this time, try to imagine a scenario where you want to move your enemy away instead of killing them. For example, imagine that Robert had a knife against my throat instead of his hands. Your objective now is to get him and that knife far away from my neck. Preferably without the knife accidentally slashing me a red smile."

Emma kept her eyes open this time and used her arms in a motion that looked like she was gathering her magic from the air next to her and shooting it towards her target. She aimed for the still smouldering dummy and flung it towards the sidewall, away from the imaginary Regina, with such force that the dummy crashed to bits against the stone wall.

Regina raised her eyebrows and her lips parted slightly in shock, she soon recovered however and let her usual dignified expression take over her features.

"Oh my, look at that. From the first moment I felt your magic when I took your hand to be helped up into your carriage, I knew it was strong and pure, but I knew that it would mean nothing if you never learned how to use it properly. Now I am certain that with continued training and with displays like *this*, you could be a magical force to be reckoned with."

Emma grinned proudly and looked at her tutor. "Just as long as I am strong enough to protect us both in the castle I will be happy."

Regina laughed and brushed the back of her hand against Emma's soft cheek. "You are there as my backup, Princess, not my knight in shining armour. If there are any risks you should let me and your werewolf godmother go first, after all, you are the sole heir to this throne. Your life is more valuable than mine."

Emma took Regina's hand and kissed the knuckles before softly whispering "funny, I was just thinking that you have become the most valuable thing in the world to me."

Regina froze in place and let Emma kiss her way up to her wrist while still looking at her with those kind and determined sea-green eyes filled with love.

As soon as her heart returned to its normal beat, Regina snapped her hand away from Emma's mouth and snarled "there will be plenty of time for soppy compliments later. Right now I will create another dummy and this time I will make it move towards you and you have to attack it. Understood?"

Emma knitted her brows at Regina's backing away but her heart still felt convinced that she was wearing the older woman's walls down. She could wait. She *would* happily wait.

Emma faced the part of the room where Regina was materializing a dummy which was rushing towards her and focused on attacking it to protect Regina.

As Emma's magic missed the first time but on the second attempt threw the dummy across the room, Regina was desperately trying not to think about Emma's affection. She tried to focus on revenge, on self-efficiency, on protecting her heart and on never again having to walk away from love with a broken heart and a bleeding lip. But still, the look of love and understanding in those green eyes kept blocking everything out and the room suddenly seemed filled with the sweet scent of Emma's hair. It almost made Regina dizzy again.

As they practised the move once more, Regina allowed herself to place a hand on Emma's lower back. She said it was to keep Emma's posture correct but in truth she was basking at the immense comfort and pleasure in just that mere touch. How much longer could she keep her heart protected? Was this a battle she had already lost? The questions crowded her mind and she tried to let them go and just focus on her hand on the warmth of Emma's back.

Preparations

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Hello everyone! Firstly, a warning that this chapter is not safe for work. Secondly, I'm starting to get a little unsure of my writing here so if you are still reading and enjoying this, just know that a comment to let me know that would make all the difference to me. Anyway, I'll pick the remainder of my pride up from the floor now and continue with chapter 22!

Finally all their allies had sent the reinforcements and they were ready to attack. The tension was palpable throughout the castle and no one had gotten a really good night's sleep for a while now. Even with the element of surprise on their side there was a sense of dread and an unspoken worry that they would all be marching to their death soon.

As it was their closest neighbouring kingdom, Swordsbane was only a few hours away by carriage, but for them to march their collected forces up there it would take the whole day even if they started at the crack of dawn.

"I suggest we march there tomorrow morning, make camp behind Greenacre hill for a nights rest and attack at first light the next day," Snow said at the impromptu war council that evening.

Regina sighed from her position of leaning against the doorframe, a position which she had chosen instead of sitting around the table with the others. "*OR* we could attack the moment we arrive, by the cover of darkness. Yes, the soldiers would be exhausted from marching but at least it means they'll only be attacking the royal guard and whatever

knights are in residence at the castle and not the vast army King Robert will call in if he spots us," she said tersely.

"It's not the way things are done in war," Charming said with a sour look at Regina. When she just glared back he continued, "the soldiers and our own royal guard won't stand for it."

"They will if you *order it*," Regina hissed and Emma worried that there might be another heated debate between the two of them.

Taking a deep breath, Emma calmly and loudly said, "I'm sorry, but I agree with Regina. The idea behind this was a surprise attack. Even if we manage to hide our army, their captured sorceress might feel our presence and let Robert and Desiree know."

Red shrugged. "Yes, but what is to say that doesn't happen as soon as we are nearing the castle?"

"All the more reason to attack the second we can," Emma replied grimly.

"And what about the exhausted and starving soldiers that you are sending into battle against rested knights? Sweetheart, are you sure you are not sending them in to be slaughtered?" Snow asked.

Emma glared at her mother. "They are not there to conquer the kingdom or to best the enemy, they are just there to keep the fighting forces busy and be a distraction. We all agreed on this attack and whether there is a night's sleep in it or not, *there will be bloodshed*."

Snow nodded meekly, realising that she had been a little too harsh to her daughter. It was just that it frightened her to see Emma agree with Regina over her father's advice like that. Snow wasn't sure just how much of an influence Regina had already gotten over their only child and it worried her.

The room went silent until Red cleared her throat and said, "having given it some thought, I would have to agree with Emma and Regina

here. I say we let the men stop for some sustenance and a brief rest and then we attack. Trying to lay camp and sleep throughout the night will take too much time."

Regina suddenly locked eyes with Snow and realised that the Queen had been staring at her. Snow's face look worried and Regina gave another sigh as she realised that she was about to try and soften the blow. This castle had made her such a weakling! "I could create a potion which would give them some energy. That combined with a bite to eat should have them forgetting their fatigue for a few hours at least. It might not be proper military practice but I truly believe it is what we *have* to do."

Charming nodded slowly and reluctantly. "Alright. We'll take a brief break after the march and then attack. I take no responsibility for an attack in the dark though! All matter of things could go wrong."

"Ah, but we have magic on our side now.," Red answered him kindly as she pointed towards the direction where Emma sat and Regina stood, "I'm sure that will counteract the negative impact of the darkness."

Charming gave a non-committal shrug and sat back in his chair. Silence fell once more as they all drifted away in their own thoughts and fears.

The commander of the royal guards stifled a yawn before saying, "it's getting late and I believe we have planned our two-pronged attack as meticulously as we can these last few days, your Majesties. Might it be time to end the war council and all try to get some sleep before the march tomorrow?"

"Yes of course," Snow replied. "Everyone should get ready for the early start tomorrow and then get some sleep."

The meeting broke up and they all filtered out of the room. As Emma walked past Regina, who was still leaning against the doorframe in such a graceful way that it looked like she was posing for a painting,

she let her hand brush against the brunette's. They didn't have to speak or look at each other to know that Regina would be magically poofing herself into Emma's bedchambers as soon as the castle had grown silent.

If the tension had been bad for the last couple of days, it reached new heights the next morning. As Emma walked from her bedchamber, dressed in mail and leathers, she almost felt like she could sense clenched jaws and furrowed brows on all the castle's inhabitants. Even the young footman who served her eggs and porridge seemed anxious and ready to fight, and he wasn't even leaving the castle!

She ate with good appetite despite the early hour and what the day had in store for her. She knew that she should be anxious but the truth was that the idea of fighting was making her blood course hot through her veins. Regina had commented on that when they were in bed last night.

Two orgasms in, Emma had flipped Regina over, kissed her way up the brunette's back until she was laying on top of her and begun to frenziedly enter the brunette with three fingers from behind. Regina had laughed haughtily at Emma's eagerness, which had just made Emma stop to wet her thumb in Regina's soaked folds and then slide the small digit up Regina's back passage while her other four fingers entered the older woman's flexible cunt.

Regina had gasped at the double intrusion of all Emma's fingers but then just breathily purred "*my*, Princess... the eve of battle really brings out the passion in you, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps, but perhaps it's *you*. Maybe it is you and your incredible body that drives me this mad?" Emma had panted as she continued drilling her fingers in and out of Regina's two orifices without mercy.

Regina was moaning too loudly to reply now and Emma was glad that the older woman had soundproofed her bedchambers a couple of nights ago.

Emma panted, "do you want me to stop? Do you want me to take my thumb out of your ass? Do you want it gentler or slower?"

Regina had laughed between her moans and then in a voice which broke from the way she was being pounded into the bed she replied, "actually, I was about to ask for it *harder*."

Emma had wanted to howl with how much this woman drove her wild and happy but instead she just lovingly growled "you perfect, exquisite, wanton little harlot. I'll give you anything you could ever want and I will sure as hell give you *that*!"

And she had.

Emma grinned happily to herself as she ate her porridge and remembered how Regina had slapped her thigh when they were done and complained about having to magically heal love bites and the soreness between her legs.

However, it was very clear from Regina's tone of voice that she wasn't really complaining at all. In fact Emma had a feeling that after the battle, Regina would be wanting an encore but that this time it would be *her* biting the pillow and begging for it harder and faster. Emma knew she wouldn't mind that at all. After all, *turnabout is fair play* as they say.

Suddenly Red walked into the room with her son and her daughters in tow. "Good morning, Emma," they all chorused.

"Oh, good morning," Emma said and blushed crimson.

"I thought I'd bring the next generation of the wolf pack. They will stay and fight with your parents while I go with you and Regina," Red said and kissed Emma on a blushing cheek. Her daughters and son did the same and Emma prayed they wouldn't notice her embarrassment.

Charming walked into the room while still doing up his leather jerkin. "Oh, that's splendid news," he exclaimed and gave all the werewolves

a welcoming hug each. It always made Emma smile to think of how warm and welcoming her father was.

Cecily, Red's oldest daughter, patted Charming on the back as she said, "yep, everyone's here. Well except my husband who is home with the baby. Since Hugh can't turn into a wolf and has an injured right arm, we decided he should stay at home while I went into the fray."

Emma looked impressed and said, "the man stays home with the baby while the woman goes to battle? That's unusual!"

"So is a princess and only heir to the throne risking her pretty neck in a fight," Cecily countered with a grin.

Emma grinned back as Charming sighed and muttered, "don't think I haven't tried to stop her."

"Don't worry yourself, old friend. Anyone who wants to hurt your little princess will have to go through me," Red said and playfully hit Charming on the stomach.

In the doorway, Snow stood watching the people she cared about joke about the upcoming battle and felt her stomach roil. Suddenly there was a gentle hand on her shoulder and a deep female voice said, "don't worry. Blood will be spilled today but I doubt very much any of it will be *blue blood*."

Snow turned around and saw Regina standing behind her. The older brunette wasn't looking at the Queen though, she was looking straight at Emma with a determined expression. Snow breathed out a breath she hadn't known she had been holding in. Maybe there was a good side to her former-hero-now-turned-dark-sorceress being in some form of relationship with her daughter? Maybe it meant that Emma would at least be safe?

They headed out just as the sun was rising. The royals, Regina, the commander and the royal guards were all on horseback. The

werewolves had shifted into wolfshape and ran fast on muscled legs around the horses, who were used to the big wolves, and after them came all the soldiers on foot.

The travel felt agonizingly slow to Regina who had to stifle the inner voice that kept pointing out that there was surely a way she could have handled this faster and easier on her one. It would most certainly have been more dangerous but at least it would have been fast and she wouldn't have to wait for the three royal, *moral compasses* in front of her to agonize over what was *right* before making even the smallest of decisions.

It felt slow to Emma as well. A few years ago she had taken part in quelling some violent rebels on the borders of their kingdom, and done quite well, but other than that she had always been left at home when there was a battle to be fought.

She wasn't naïve enough to think this would be all honour and valour though, she knew that fighting meant pain and blood and suffering. But she also knew that she hated being at home waiting helplessly when the battle was being fought by others.

At least today she could be useful! Even though she would be sneaking around in the castle with Regina and Red and not out front at the big battle, she would still be playing a vital part with her magic and her sword at the ready.

She could take all those hours of swordplay and make good use of them, she could protect and she could help and... yes... she might just be able to finally impress Regina. She loathed herself for that last wish, but it was there all the same. If she couldn't impress the woman she had fallen for with her magic she would at least do it with her sword skills.

The day passed with only the slightest of breaks for food, rest and calls of nature. As the day grew hotter Emma began to sweat in her leather, mail and sword belt and looked enviously at Regina who had agreed to the leather but refused any sort of metal to weigh her down. In fact the

brunette looked very cool and unperturbed by the warm day and the long ride, so much so that when she caught the tired Emma looking at her she gave a flirty smile and a wink. *Great, Emma thought, now I feel even warmer.*

Just as the last evening light was fading into the darkness of night, Snow, who had better eye sight than her husband and daughter, squinted by the light of the torch she held in her left hand and said, "I think I can see the castle!"

"Aye, I think I do too," the commander agreed after a second or two.

They rode on a little further and could soon make out Greenacre hill, the only place where they could hide their army from being seen from Swordsbane castle. There they settled down and soon provisions were handed out. All of them had been given a small vial of the invigorating potion Regina had prepared, and as soon as they had eaten and had some water, they all drank it and then prepared their weapons and shields.

After doing the rounds to ensure that everyone was doing well, Emma dismounted and turned to see her parents kissing and embracing, something they always did before any perilous situation. Emma grimaced and turned to Regina who had dismounted as well and was now absentmindedly petting one of the large werewolves.

"I do apologize for my parents," the blonde muttered.

"Don't. If I had a beautiful woman to kiss for good luck, I would certainly take the opportunity," Regina said with a smirk and walked off into the part of their camp not lit up by torches.

Emma went to follow her but was stopped by a large black wolf. It stood right in front of her and gave an almost questioning whimper. Emma scratched it behind the ear and whispered "it's ok, Red. I know what I'm doing. I'll be right back."

She continued to follow Regina into the darkness until she felt the brunette take her hands and pull her in close for a kiss. Emma grabbed her tight and they both kissed until they were out of breath. Then Regina pulled away and said, "well Princess, not long now. I hope you are ready for our little mission?"

"With you beside me, I am ready for anything," Emma whispered and stole another kiss.

It's time

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Firstly, I am well aware that I am making my own mish-mash of what sort of army and battle plans these people have and I apologize for that. But as the Enchanted Forest in OUAT has elements from different historical eras and sometimes their own made up things, I feel permitted to take some liberties. Secondly, thank you all for your kind messages after yesterday's author's note, I will answer them all as soon as I can. You are amazing! Thirdly and MOST IMPORTANTLY... this chapter will be traumatic and sad but remember that there is no major character death in this story.

They all stood peering at the castle through the dark veil of night. Everyone was ready to fight but they were waiting on one key thing. The attack at the front gate couldn't take place until Emma, Regina and Red were inside and had engaged Robert and Desiree. If the attack happened first, Robert would no doubt go down to join the fray and suddenly be protected by his large amounts of royal guards and the knights in residence. Swordsbane had superior manpower so even without their vast army they were still close to being matched with the forces Charming and Snow had.

So the key thing they waited for was Regina to turn into raven-form and do her recognisance flight. She was making them wait, her sense of the dramatic adoring that most of the soldiers hadn't seen any real magic be performed. Even the royal guard had only seen Emma's magical mishaps where things would usually set on fire or someone be turned into a crustacean.

Regina handed Imperia's reins, Emma had made certain that Regina had been given the same horse as that day when they raced, to a nearby soldier. Then she stood back and crouched gracefully. Everyone who could still see her was watching her intently.

She was wearing black leather and even in the dim light of the torches everyone could see the black leather ripple as the texture began to turn into feathers. Regina shook and began to diminish in size. She shook again and the structure of her arms began to resemble wings. The leather was almost completely turned into feathers now and as she continued to shrink her skin turn feathered as well. She shook again and talons and a beak formed. With one last shake she turned completely from woman into a raven.

Emma suddenly felt a strange sense of pride. The magic that she had been hiding and been embarrassed about for her whole life could do things like this. One day, *she* could do things like this. Although, Regina had admitted that the transformation was particularly unpleasant and painful and that she herself had only learned one animal, as animal transmogrification took many years to manage for each form you were learning. Emma decided that if she were ever to learn a form to take, she would chose a wolf. That way she could go running in the moonlight with Red and the younger werewolves which she had always thought of as cousins.

Suddenly Regina took flight. She flew perilously close to Emma's head and the blonde laughed as a few hairs were ripped out of her braid from the raven's passing talons. Snow winced at the sight and Charming turned to her and smiled as he said "don't worry, my love, it's only a few hairs out of place".

Snow once again wondered if she should tell her husband that what had worried her wasn't the strands being pulled free from Emma's braid. It was how Regina and Emma seemed to be forcefully drawn to each other like the sea to the shore. She decided to wait until after the battle to explain that she was afraid that Regina's waves would wash Emma's sand away until she wasn't recognizable to them anymore. She shook her head and tried to focus on the battle ahead.

Regina flew through the dark, grateful for the raven's sharp eyesight. She flew past window after window, and even peered through some arrowslits as she passed them, and yet did not see any of the royals. Part of her hoped they had gone to sleep, she wouldn't slay them in their sleep of course. *No, she'd wake them first.*

She wasn't expecting to catch sight of the captive sorceress as she assumed that they would be keeping her down in the dungeons, that was what she had seen when she connected to her via the spider after all.

Suddenly she stopped mid-flight outside a floor-length stained glassed window, through the colourful glasswork depicting a knight giving a maiden a flower it was hard to make much out. But there were candles and a large fire lit in this room and Regina could see people moving around.

Through a clear piece of the glass, supposed to be the sky in the artwork, Regina managed to see a slim man playing a flute to a rapt audience. Someone in the audience walked to the flute-player and patted him on the shoulder before clapping. Despite the dark and the narrow piece of clear window the sharp raven eyes recognized the clapping man as King Robert.

Regina took one last look at the room to find a place to poof too and spotted a half open door behind the flute-player, that would have to do! She took off and flew back to where the others were waiting. As soon as she had landed she gradually morphed back into human form and with an echo of the raven's caw still in her voice she croaked "I've found him! He is in the middle level of the tower at the east wing. I believe his family is with him."

"Can you transport there?" Snow asked.

"I believe so, but they will see us straight away so although I will attempt to subdue them instantly, we better be prepared to fight the moment we arrive," Regina replied with a look at Emma and the large black wolf at her side.

Red bared her teeth and growled low and even Regina felt a shiver run down her spine at the frightening sound. *Perhaps I should acquire a werewolf bodyguard*, she thought and smiled at the lycanthrope.

Emma walked up to her parents to give them each a kiss on the cheek, then she turned to Regina, placed her hand on her sword and muttered, "right, let's get those bastards."

Red gave a low bark towards the other wolves and they repeated the sound back. Emma went over to pet the large, black wolf and whispered "if you wish to stay with them, I'd understand."

The wolf made a sound that was somewhere between a scoff and a sniff and moved closer to Emma. The blonde kissed the wolf's cheek and hoped that was socially acceptable. Regina walked over to them. "Are we ready," she asked with a quirked eyebrow and serious expression.

Emma nodded, and from the confines of Emma's soft grip, the wolf gave another low bark, this one sounding quite eager. Regina placed her hand on Emma's shoulder and made all three of them vanish from the hill in a cloud of purple smoke.

They appeared in the open doorway just as Regina had planned and the brunette shot a volley of subduing magic which spread through the room. Emma could see people freezing in the middle of their motion. The flute-player went quiet as the air stilled in his flute, King Robert froze just as he reached for his sword and Queen Desiree was still smiling at the flute-player, seeming unaware that something was happening. Emma could see the two teenage princes standing behind their parents' chairs with glasses of port, glasses that they would now never get a chance to empty.

The problem was that there was one person who had not frozen in place. A blonde, bedraggled woman had been sitting on a chair straight in front of them. Her eerily vacant eyes had been staring down and her head lolling forwards when they arrived, but now she rose with a banshee scream and threw herself at Regina, pushing them both

towards the floor-length glass window. Magic sparked around the bedraggled, slim blonde and seemed to give her unhuman strength as she pushed Regina towards the window.

Just as Regina raised her hand to respond with magic and as Emma followed them to get the blood-crusted blonde off Regina, the dishevelled sorceress managed to push them both through the window. The last words Emma heard before she toppled down with them was the slim blonde screaming, "they will kill my Frederick if I don't kill you!"

They fell through the cold air and Emma could hear Red howling after them from the smashed window. Just before they hit the ground, Emma noticed that Regina was turning herself into a raven and that the blonde sorceress had somehow made herself fall so slow that she was going to land softly on her feet.

Emma on the other hand had just panicked and not taken any magical precaution to make sure she survived the fall, and as Regina could not use her magic in raven form she was powerless to help Emma in the brief second she had before the princess hit the ground. Regina's panicked mind was screaming at her for not choosing some other solution than turning into a raven, but survival instinct had just taken over.

Meanwhile, Red was thinking like a wolf and a human all at once, not able to separate the two in her panic. She decided to ignore her prey in the room, she had to go down and help Emma! On quick wolf's legs she ran through the castle, mowing servants who had woken from the screams down as she ran. As she finally exited the castle she could see Snow fighting a fat knight, who she clearly had hit with an arrow in the leg and was now finishing off with her sword.

Red ran over and ripped the knight's exposed throat out and then slowly turned back into human form in front of Snow.

"Oh thanks, but I could have handled..." Snow began.

"No time!" Red said and took Snow's hand to run to where the three women had fallen. The two middle aged women ran for dear life, Red because she knew what hurry they were in and Snow because she knew that Red wouldn't be acting this way unless Emma was in danger.

When they arrived they saw Regina morphing back from raven form and next to her sat an unkempt woman who swayed and mumbled quiet words towards a heap of something on the ground.

"What's... what's happened?" Snow gasped. She looked at the dirty blonde who was mumbling nonsense over the heap and gasped, "*Abigail?*"

The blonde sorceress looked up at Snow as if she was shocked that someone knew her name. Suddenly Red remembered why the woman covered in wounds and dirt had seemed so familiar when she saw her up in the tower. This was King Midas' daughter. This was the woman James had been betrothed to once!

"I'm so sorry! Robert said he would kill my Frederick if I didn't use my powers to defeat his enemies. He tortured me to make me spy on you and when I told him that you had traced the spider back to me, he kept me close to him so that I could fight off any magical attacks. I knew I wasn't as strong as the famous Regina Mills though, so I had to push her out the window. I didn't want to hurt her or anyone else," Abigail finished and pointed to the heap she had been mumbling over.

Just as Snow looked down and realised that the heap of something that Abigail had been bending over was her only daughter, Regina had turned back into human form and thrown herself over Emma while keening and searching the blonde's chest for a heartbeat.

Snow screamed! She screamed as if she never planned to stop, and as she bent down and pushed Regina away to check on her only child, she barely heard Regina cry out that there was a heartbeat over her own screams.

Red immediately turned into the wolf and ran to find Charming.

Regina got up from where Snow had pushed her over. She was crying and shaking, guilt and fear nearly driving her mad. In pleading wails she managed to say, "Snow... Snow... she's alive. Let me heal her!"

Snow held her darling girl close to her chest, rocking slightly back and forth and making Emma's blood spill on her mail and her white leather jerkin. Snow's eyes were big in panic and everything about her body language seemed to scream *protective mother*. She snapped at Regina, "NO! Get away from her! You did this! You and your magic! You're evil! I could see it the second you arrived. You seduced my girl, didn't you? And then you made her die for you! Did you use her to soften your landing, Regina?!"

The words hit Regina as if they were a sword piercing her chest. She reached out towards the blonde cradled close to Snow's chest and, with her words barely audible through her cries and sobs, she begged, "no, Snow, please don't say these things! I feel worse than you can ever imagine because I didn't protect her... there wasn't time... I couldn't...please let me heal her! I can take care of her. Just let me hold her!"

Snow whipped her head over to stare deep into Regina's red eyes. Both women had tears streaming down their faces and both were shaking with shock.

When Snow now spoke her voice had gone cold and serious. "No. She'll be better off without you. Now run away and get your revenge on King Robert before my husband gets here and kills you! Go get your revenge, it was all you ever cared about anyway!"

For a few seconds they just stared at each other. They could hear the sounds of the battle in the background and Abigail's half-crazed mumbling and even Emma's rasped, shallow breathing, but none of it really registered.

Regina felt the full weight of Snow's glare and suddenly it all became so clear. She had somehow managed to win Emma and from there on she had done everything *wrong*. She had toyed with the young woman and pushed her away when the blonde had gotten too close. She had taught her magic but never the important things, like how to protect herself. She shouldn't have let such a novice magician come with her, no matter her sword skills.

Regina's heart seemed to implode as she looked at Emma, whom Snow was rocking back and forth as if she was a child being rocked to sleep, and realised that she had never told Emma she loved her, in fact she had fought to make sure Emma never knew. And now the magnificent blonde might never know... *and it was all her fault*.

Regina continued berating herself and completely quieted the small sensible voice that was coming up with counterarguments. She knew the small voice was wrong, she knew she was doom to those who loved her. Her parents were now alone and convinced they never managed to have a child, Daniel had died a painful death, Maleficent was left with an eternally broken heart and now Emma... Sweet Emma... who knew what would happen to her?

Snow was right. She had to leave. She had to stop putting everyone she loved in danger. She had to hope that physicians could save Emma or that this Abigail could help heal the injuries. She had to.... She had to... *kill*.

Her face changed from complete loss to burning hate in a heartbeat. Robert and Desiree would pay for what they had done. She would make them bleed their lives away in agony. If she was a monster not made for love, the least she could do was be a monster who killed for revenge. She would make them apologize to Emma as they died, even the teenage boys.

She crawled away from the others and slowly stood, her face was a mask of crazed hatred. Then she vanished in purple smoke and appeared in the room where she had left Desiree, Robert, the flute-player and the boys. There was no mercy in her now, there was no

sense of right and wrong and innocent or not... every person in that room would soon suffer a fate worse than death at her hands.

Red and Charming arrived by Snow's side. Charming was bleeding from the ear and neck where a sword had caught him but otherwise he seemed alright. Until he saw Emma. He fell to his knees and silent tears fell from his eyes before his knees even impacted on the earth.

Snow turned to Red and quaveringly said, "call for retreat. Gather what wounded you can and make sure you take Abigail here with you for questioning. Me and Charming will steal the Foxcote's fastest carriage and get Emma home right away."

Red nodded mutely and took one last look at her goddaughter who was still breathing raggedly and bleeding profusely against her mother's chest. Then she hurried back to the fray to call for retreat.

Conversations during consciousness

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Okay, so I have received a lot of tear-filled Snow hate in my reviews. That's not surprising and I'm not trying to say that she is a saint, but I still feel that I need to remind you that she was a panicked and grieving mother who was certain that the culprit (Regina) of probably killing her only child was sitting in front of her. Hopefully the next chapter will explain her actions a little more so that you can see why she made her grievous mistake, even if you don't forgive it. Thank you for all your feedback (even those who cursed my name) and I'm sorry if I made you cry! (I'll try to reply to all the reviews as soon as I can.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Emma felt like she was buried in a large layer of quilts. Everything felt far away and as if it had nothing to do with her. All she felt was swaddled in white light, strange warmth and excruciating pain. The pain came and went though, and she assumed that this was why she seemed to be dragged back into deep sleep against her will constantly.

When she was awake the pain was so strong and her mind was so confused that she couldn't move, not even open her eyes. All she could do was lie there and wait for the pain to become too much so that her mind closed down her body once more. During the moments when she was awake she could hear people talking in her room, sometimes they spoke to her but more frequently they spoke to each other.

Emma soon gathered that her mother and father spent most of their time in her room. When Emma felt someone wash her limp body with

a cold cloth or someone gently pouring a few drops of honeyed milk into her mouth, it was always her mother and not a maid as she would have assumed.

There was someone else there too, someone's whose voice was unfamiliar to Emma, someone who placed their hands on Emma's skin and made certain pains bearable for a few blessed moments. Emma could feel things in her body mending painfully and slowly when those hands were on her. She felt what was unmistakably magic course into her and felt it keep her alive and slowly piece her back together.

Emma kept listening out for one voice. A certain husky and deep female voice with an alluring cadence in its speech. But she never heard Regina's voice. She did hear her name though. She heard it from her mother, her father and often from Red who seemed to spend quite a bit of time by the sickbed as well.

When Emma was conscious she tried to piece together the conversations she had heard to figure out what had happened.

The first time she woke she heard her parents speaking to each other in trembling and quiet voices.

Her father's wavering voice asking, "Snow, what happened out there?"

"I... I don't know. Everything happened so fast. I was fighting a knight and then Red came and pulled me away and dragged away from the battle. As I followed her I swear I could feel my heart cease to beat. I knew there was only one reason Red would make me leave the fray. I knew Emma was either in danger or... dead. By the time we arrived I was frantic."

"And Emma was on the ground?" Charming asked in a small voice.

"Yes, Abigail was sitting over Emma's lifeless body. I was ready to throttle *her* first but then Regina threw herself onto Emma and my fury just moved to her. That woman was supposed to be one of the most powerful creatures in our world, so why did *our Emma* end up in a torn

pile of blood and flaxen hair? I just couldn't..." Snow broke off as sobs overtook her.

Emma could hear her father making soothing sounds and the noise of someone's cries being muffled by an embrace.

The crying went on for a long time and Emma realised that she had never heard so much fear in her mother's voice before. After a while Snow continued speaking through sniffs.

"S-She said she wanted to heal her but I wouldn't let her dangerous hands anywhere near my little girl. Having magic nearly cost Emma her life, without it she wouldn't have been up in that tower, and now *that woman* wanted to use magic to heal her? How could I trust her? How could I trust magic? Everyone tells you how evil and dangerous magic is, how could I let it near my baby when she was so injured and vulnerable?"

"Oh Snow. I understand your mistrust, I think anyone in this realm would have felt the same. But, my love, I think we have to try magic despite our fears. The physicians say that there is nothing else they can do. They say that too much inside of Emma is broken and they don't know how to mend it," Charming lamented.

Snow cleared her voice. "Alright, we'll ask Abigail to see what she can do. Make her if you have to! But I can't get myself to trust Regina. I knew she had changed from the first time you brought her here in the carriage. She was so... *different* and alarm bells went off in my mind. She wouldn't let me in. I tried to talk to her about old times and about what had happened in our lives, but she just kept pushing me away. It was like she didn't want me to *unearth things*, like she had big secrets that she had to keep hidden. I worried that we couldn't trust her and still I was stupid enough to leave her alone with our only child. She stayed away from us the entire time she was here, the only person she truly spoke to was Emma. Don't you see! She was pulling her into her web, taking her away from me!"

Emma wanted to speak up from her bed and say that Regina didn't want to take her away. In fact the brunette had been fighting the urge to take Emma at all, keeping her at arm's length to keep from being hurt. She wanted to explain that the reason Regina was keeping secrets was that she didn't believe anyone would wish to be around her if they knew the things she had done. There was blood on her hands and she didn't want to show the girl who used to idolize her that.

Emma decided that she would keep the fact that Regina got very annoyed with anyone too sugary sweet, like Snow and Charming, to herself, that wasn't important right now. But Emma couldn't say any of those things. She couldn't even open her lips, and as she tried, focusing all of her energy and even some of her magic to explain to her distraught parents, the pain got too much and she passed out once more.

The next conversation she woke to was between her mother and Red. There was more crying. Emma wondered if her mother did anything but care for her and cry these days. Had she eaten? Had she slept?

"Red. I don't know what happened to Regina and I can't apologize for driving her away. I was in such a panic! Anyway, it's not like I could have kept her from Emma if she didn't want to go. She has magic, she could have healed Emma and kept me and Charming tied up while she did it. Even Regina knew that she was toxic for Emma. She corrupted my little girl!"

"Your little girl is 25 years old, sweetest. And she was no innocent virgin when Regina arrived, you knew that. Anyway, we don't know what went on between them. I think the fact that you couldn't protect her and that they wouldn't let you into their lives made you think the worst. *It made you think the worst about Regina,*" Red said kindly and sighed sadly before continuing.

"You weren't seeing her clearly that night and neither was Charming. You were both too panicked and heartbroken and you needed someone to blame. It's only human. But so is Regina. She made a mistake in that

she didn't save Emma, but I do believe that it was just a mistake and that it hurt her almost as much as it did you."

Snow scoffed.

Red ignored the scoff and kept talking. "Look, I'm a mother too. If some ominous, dark stranger endangered my child I would want her far away too. I'm just saying that when Emma wakes up, and she will wake up, she might see things differently. Keep your mind open and try to see beyond your maternal instinct."

"Maybe... I... I just want to do what's right. And I just don't know anymore. I just want to keep her safe, Red."

"I know, dearest. But sometimes we can't protect our young. Sometimes we have to let them take their own risks, and if Emma thinks Regina is worth the risk... you'll just have to stand aside and be prepared to help if you are needed."

Emma tried to stay awake, she wanted to hear more of this conversation, but it was to no avail and she sank back into forced sleep. The darkness swallowing her whole and giving her respite from the pain.

The next time she woke she heard her mother hum a lullaby she had sung to her when she was little. The sound was strangely soothing, despite that Emma was an adult and far beyond any night terrors that could be quelled with a lullaby and a cool hand on her forehead. Emma let the sound take her back to sleep, going willingly into it this time.

The next time she awoke she felt a little better. There was a warm current running through her and she recognised the feel of magic. Hands were held on her stomach, just lightly enough for Emma to feel the touch, and magic seemed to be coming from them and undoing what felt like painful knots in Emma's stomach and chest.

Emma could hear her father say, "she's getting a little more colour in her cheeks now."

"Yes, I think her body is finally making up for some of the blood she lost. I only hope I can heal enough of her injuries today to make her wake up and take some food and drink. Even with magic, her body needs sustenance if she is to survive," that by now familiar yet unknown female voice replied.

Charming cleared his throat. "Abigail. I haven't really gotten a chance to speak to you. I'm sorry that we are making you do this when I am sure you wish to be out there searching for Frederick."

"It's alright. I have been forced to do so much evil the last couple of weeks that I am glad for the chance to do something good. As soon as Emma is better, I would very much like to be let free though. I have to see what the Foxcote's have done to him," the woman named Abigail responded.

"Of course. We'll help you. We don't know what has become of Robert and Desiree. After that night when we left the castle we haven't really cared about anything but Emma. It's a fault in our family, that we get blinded by love I mean. But as soon as Emma is doing better we will sort out this mess and I promise I will do anything to help you be reunited with Frederick. Might I ask what happened? Last time I heard of you, you had managed to wake Frederick from his curse but then Midas threw you out?"

Abigail sighed. Emma could feel her hands move over to her hips and heard a faint snap as something in her re-aligned because of the magic.

"I should start from when you left. You left to be with Snow, something which I still support by the way. True love should never be kept stopped. My father was furious however, and some of that fury spilled over onto me. He felt that I had let him down by not making you fall in love with me. He locked me in a tower and from there I could not continue my work to try and get Frederick back from his cursed state of gold. But I remembered a tale my nurse maid used to

tell, and feeling that I had nothing to lose, I called for Rumplestiltskin."

"Abigail. I'm so sorry, I should have stayed long enough to help you cure Frederick but things happened so fast with Snow and we had to elope in the night," Charming said sadly.

"Oh, that's all in the past. You had your own love to fight for. Anyway, Rumplestiltskin came when I invoked him and he said he would teach me magic. That way I could bring Frederick back myself and I could stand up to my father. He said that the only thing he wanted in return for teaching me was that I one day help him cast a curse so that he could be with his son in another realm," Abigail explained as she moved her hands to Emma's knee which felt like it was not even a part of her anymore. But as Abigail's magic flowed into it, Emma felt as if her knee was getting the worst case of pins and needles she had ever experienced and it settled in nicely with the rest of her pains and aches.

Abigail continued telling her story. "So he taught me magic, but I was a poor pupil. I just didn't have enough natural magic in me he said and then there was the fact that I was squeamish about killing any living creature. I did it, of course, I would do anything for my Frederick but I always ended up an emotional wreck killing anything or anyone and Rumple had no patience with it. One day I found a note saying that he had found another way to travel between realms. Something about forcing a blue fairy to hand over a spare magic bean? Suddenly he was just gone. Luckily I had at least learned enough magic to free Frederick and he and I eloped from my father's wrath and his plans to marry me off to some prince."

"I'm glad to hear it," Charming said kindly.

"We were happy together! We had a son, Lucius, who grew up to marry a girl from the southern isles and rules her kingdom with her now. We don't see him very often since he lives so far away but he always writes. Obviously I haven't been able to contact him since I've been captive though."

"As soon as you are done here today I will bring you to our scribe and we will get a letter sent off to him," Charming promised.

"Thank you. Anyway, to conclude my tale, one day we were asked to dinner by the King and Queen of Swordsbane. We attended it and everything seemed fine until we made to leave at the end of the night. We stood up and both felt very dizzy. That was when Desiree informed us that there had been a sleeping draft in our syrup and blackberry sponge. As I felt the world spin she ordered guards to take us to separate prison cells. When I woke in the morning, she and Robert were there. They made me write a letter to our court and inform them that we would be staying with the Foxcote's for a couple of weeks and then they told me their plan."

"Which was?" Charming enquired and Emma could hear the anger in her father's voice. She felt it too, Robert and Desiree had a lot of blood and broken happiness on their hands.

"Frederick was to be kept hostage and unless I helped them defeat their enemies, and finally bring Emma to them, he would be killed. They tortured me when I tried to fight them with my magic, my skills weren't strong enough to break through. They wanted to use me for experiments, to find out what made my magic work, but they knew that I would have to be returned to my kingdom intact or a war would break out. As you know, the kingdom and army left behind from my father's rule is not to be trifled with," Abigail said and took her hands off Emma.

Emma still felt horrible pain but it wasn't as blinding and she could actually distinguish what body parts it was coming from, that felt better, her body felt less alien to her now.

"Didn't they think you'd start a war anyway as soon as you were freed?" Charming asked his former fiancée.

"They said that by then they would have Emma and that they knew that her powers were stronger than mine. You must realise that Robert and Desiree believe themselves to be stronger and smarter than anyone

else, defeat never really occurs to them and that means that their plans don't really make sense to anyone logical. They're mad and they are dangerous. I would be beside myself with grief thinking that they had tortured my husband to death if it wasn't for the fact that I can feel that Frederick is still alive. I don't know how he can be, but thanks to my magic I can feel him in my heart. He's alive."

"Good, I'm relieved to hear it. As I said, as soon as Emma is stable we will return to the fight against Swordsbane and we will retrieve Frederick," Charming promised.

"Perhaps when I send my letter to Lucius I should send one to my commander at arms too? Ask him to ready the troops for war against Swordsbane?" Abigail asks in a small voice, she sounded so unsure of herself and Emma wondered if she was always like this or if the torture that she went through had made her weaker.

"Excellent idea. We'll fight them together," Charming boomed.

"James?"

"Yes?"

"I am so sorry that I almost got your daughter killed."

Charming was silent for a while. "I know. I and Snow have struggled to forgive both you and Regina since that night, but I think we are both slowly getting there. We just have to remember that neither of you wanted to harm her. Now, come. We need to get you to the scribe and Emma needs to sleep in peace."

And sleep in peace was what Emma did, feeling her body continue the struggle of healing as she slowly drifted off into dreamless rest.

A visit

Emma's feet felt cold. She tried to use her toes to pull the covers over them and clumsily succeeded. Then she froze in shock. One, she had just felt something in her body which wasn't just pain. Two, she had moved quite easily. She tried opening her eyes and found that she could, despite them being almost glued together by sleep grit and dryness.

Her body still hurt, she felt like she had bruises on every inch of her body, but it was a manageable pain. What she mostly felt was hungry and thirsty. That had to be a good sign, right? She tried calling out for someone but only produced a faint wheezing sound, it felt like her throat was lined with sandpaper. She tried again and produced the same kind of wheezing sound, but this time in a higher pitch. It wasn't what she wanted to achieve but it did the trick as it got the attention of someone.

"Emma? Sweetheart?" Snow mumbled as she roused herself from having fallen asleep seated in an armchair next to Emma's sickbed.

After that everything had happened so quickly. The physicians had been called in and together with Snow they had to admit that the fiendish magic had actually saved Emma's life. Snow sent one of her carrier pigeons to Red to convey the good news and ask her to come see her goddaughter while Charming ordered the kitchen to prepare all of Emma's favourite dishes. Soon Emma sat in a room filled with plates containing treacle tarts, candied pears, beef and ale pie and several pitchers of honeyed milk. She tried to eat some of the delectable dishes but felt immediately ill and Snow had to berate her husband for his stupidity and order up some plain broth for Emma's stomach, which had grown unaccustomed to food in the three days where she had lived on small amounts of honeyed milk and magic.

It was another three days and two more sessions of Abigail's magical healing until Emma could leave her bed, and even then she was weak and unstable as a newborn calf. Snow kept away during the healing sessions while Charming was always present. Her father soon admitted to Emma that this was all on Snow's orders, the Queen wanted the visits supervised but couldn't bare watching the strange magic change things inside her daughter. Emma just shook her head, her mother's heart was in the right place but her protectiveness was growing ridiculous.

Emma noticed that Abigail seemed ashamed and contrite, and also very palpably worried. Emma tried to get someone to tell her what was happening with Swordsbane but she always got the same response, it was in hand and nothing she should worry about! It drove her mad but also made her more determined to hurry to get better.

Both her parents would pale and grow quiet when Emma tried to discuss Regina. She could sense that what she had overheard her father tell Abigail was true, they were calming down and realising that Regina hadn't set out with the intention of either hurting nor sacrificing Emma to reach her goals.

Emma had decided not to tell her parents that Regina probably had planned to do just that when she arrived to the castle but that their feelings for each other had changed something in the brunette. Still, there was that anger and tendency to attack in Regina. Emma feared for what might have happened after her mother drove Regina away.

She also feared that the darkness ran so deep in Regina's veins that they could never have a happy future together. But she pushed those thoughts away, she needed to regain her strength and then she would find Regina and figure out the two things that stood between her and the incredible sorceress, Regina's reluctance to fall in love and Regina's cruel tendencies.

It was the day of Emma's first un-aided walk through the corridor outside her bedchambers that they heard the commotion. Her parents and Red were there and Emma had to giggle at how excited her parents

were over her stumbling along the vast corridor. It was like she was taking her first steps again, but this time at the age of 25. Red caught the giggle and gave a kind smile. Emma grinned at her and pointed out "I made an apple appear out of empty air for these people and they didn't oh and ah half as much as now that I'm shuffling around this corridor!"

That was when they heard the noise of running servants and the nervous chatter of two footmen. Soon they both appeared in front of the royals and Red and barely took the time to bow before one of them panted. "I'm sorry, your Majesties... but... but the Queen of Swordsbane is here!"

Emma turned to her parents who were staring at each other. Red was the one to wake from the shock first and she muttered "right, lets go see what Desiree wants. She's got some nerve to just walk in here!"

They all made to walk off and Emma shuffled after them. Charming turned and looked at her incredulously. "Sweetling, you can't come. You're too weak," he said in a whispered tone as if he was talking to a dying grandparent.

Emma squared her shoulders and stared at him with her green eyes blazing. He looked back with a begging gaze for a few second until his daughter stared him down and he looked to the floor.

"Emma, sweetheart... he's right. You need to rest," Snow started but she was soon silenced by the same glare from Emma that her husband had got. She could stand the force of it for longer than her husband had, but after a while she began to chew her cheek and a worry line appeared on her forehead.

Red sighed and threw her arms out in a gesture of despair. "Oh just let her come or we'll be here all day. Charming, help her down there. We have to hurry!" Red said impatiently and shook her head in Emma's direction.

Emma just smiled triumphantly and leaned on her father's shoulder as they limped down. To not embarrass her he kept his voice low so the others couldn't hear him as he said, "I could carry you, you know. I might not be young anymore but I am still strong enough to carry you around for a good few hours without dropping you."

Emma smiled at him almost pityingly and whispered back, "if your enemy suddenly showed up in your home, would you want to go meet them while being carried by your parent?"

Charming gave a sad little smile back and shook his head.

When they got closer to the royal audience chamber Emma decided to ask her father to let her walk on her own. She knew that she must look quite weak and feeble as it was with her hair stringy and her ashen skin, she didn't want to make it any worse if she could help it.

Reluctantly he agreed and gently extricated himself from her. She straightened her stiff body out as well as she could and gave her parents a smile to show that she was alright. Her body ached, she felt tired and there was a low hum in her head, which she was convinced only rest could still, but if there was one thing Emma knew how to do, it was pretending to be strong when she wasn't. She forced her body and mind to look as stable and healthy as they could and kept her gaze locked straight ahead.

Both her parents watched her as if they were convinced she would fall into a little heap at any second and Emma noticed that Red had slowed her steps to walk next to her. They were all so sweet but suddenly it suffocated Emma. She wished Regina was there, she would have felt better about it if the brunette was there to give a sarcastic comment or to roll her eyes in Emma's direction.

As they walked down the long hall leading to the gilded doors of the audience chamber Emma stared at the collection of ceremonial swords adorning the walls and considered picking one of the beautiful swords up to drive it through Desiree's heart, but then she had to admit that she was extraordinarily curious about what Desiree could be doing here

and wanted answers more than she did blood. Who just saunters into the enemies castle? Was she here to ask for a truce and beg for mercy? Hardly. And why was she here alone? Where were her sons and husband? Had they been killed? Had... Regina killed them?

Finally at the large gilded doors, Snow nodded to the two royal guards that had stood watch and they backed up to allow their royal family to enter the room. Emma noticed that they kept right behind them though and that they both had their swordhands on the hilt of their sheathed swords.

A nervous footman hurried up to pointlessly do his duty of announcing his King and Queen. When he had introduced them he extended a hand towards the woman who stood facing a window and shakily said "The Queen of Swordsbane." The woman turned almost grudgingly and Emma gasped as she saw that it was *Regina*. She was wearing a maroon dress with rose gold details and her near-black hair was coiffured in an intricate heap on her head. Despite her newfound regal glory, she looked impossibly sad, in fact, she wasn't even meeting their gaze as she mumbled "good afternoon."

Reuniting the lovers

Chapter Notes

Author's note: As this next scene is going to be very long, I will divide it into two chapters. Read them together if you have the time or keep chapter 27 for later if you need to. Thank you for all the reviews and support!

"*Regina*," Emma breathed and stared at the sorceress as if she was seeing the sun for the first time in days.

"How? What?" Snow whispered a millisecond afterwards.

Regina held up her hand. "I'm sure you have a lot of questions and my answers will tell a... gruesome and unfortunate tale, but may I ask for some refreshments and somewhere to sit first, the trip here was tiring," the newly appointed queen said as she brought one hand up to rest on her stomach in a gesture of unease.

"Of course. I'll go ask the kitchen to serve afternoon tea in the Queen's reception room," Red replied when she saw that her royal friends were all stunned into silence. She knew that the servants would take orders from her, partly because Snow made her a duchess a decade ago and partly because she had spent more time in this castle than in her own home this week.

Regina seemed to steel herself before asking, "I realise that this is possibly the last thing you will want, Snow, but may I request a few minutes alone with Emma? You could go ahead to the Queen's

reception room and Emma could lead me there in a couple of minutes? You have my oath that no harm will come to your daughter."

"*This time*, you mean?" Charming muttered and took a step closer to Emma.

"Father! If you do not move away from me and go ahead to the reception room I swear I will refuse any food for a week," Emma said calmly without taking her eyes off Regina.

The room fell silent as Snow and Charming looked at each other in silent communication. In the end it was Snow who sighed a deep and unhappy sigh, walked up to Regina and looked her in the eye as she said "two minutes. Then you owe us an explanation and... I believe that I might owe you an apology as well."

Regina shook her head. "That will not be necessary. I know how things looked and in some ways... you were right. In all things but *one*, after I had gotten to know your daughter I never wanted to use her or sacrifice her. She is... too precious to me," Regina said with an unsteady voice but a proud posture.

Snow nodded slowly and broke eye contact as she turned to her husband. "Come on, Charming. We should go make sure that the refreshments are being served."

Charming frowned at Regina and Emma but then reluctantly followed his wife out of the room.

When the gilded doors closed behind them, Emma didn't waste a moment. She ran straight into Regina's arms and held the brunette as close as her aching body would allow.

The newly appointed Queen returned the embrace with some trepidation and Emma could feel how tense Regina was in her arms. Soon she heard the brunette hoarsely whisper, "oh my dearest, you might not want to embrace me when you know what I've done."

Emma laughed but it soon turned into a sob. "Regina. I'm not... I'm not really sure I have a choice. My body needs to be close to you just as much as my heart does. My mind seems to have very little say in the matter."

"Still," Regina said quietly and gently pushed Emma away from herself, "you need to know what I have done and I will tell you and your parents everything... but I... needed to be alone with you first to ask you if you mind me telling your parents how I feel about you? It is an integral part of what brought me back to sanity and out of the darkness, but if you don't wish to inform your parents of our... connection... then I will tell them that my feelings are one-sided."

Emma took one of the hands that Regina had used to gently push her away and brought it up to her mouth to kiss it. Then she asked with a tired but mischievous smile, "what feelings? I thought what we had was merely physical?"

Regina lunged at her and kissed her with such ferocity that Emma lost her already precarious balance and was only stopped from falling by the firm grip Regina's hands had on her waist. Emma felt the kiss all the way to her toes and was fully focused on the mind-boggling pleasure of her mouth connecting with Regina's until she felt something wet where her cheeks brushed against Regina's. She realised that the older woman was crying.

Now it was Emma's turn to gently push Regina away and pant, "what is the matter?"

In a ragged and breaking voice Regina whispered, "*I love you.*"

Emma smiled and kissed away a falling tear from Regina's powdered cheek before whispering back, "I know. I'm just so glad that you finally know it too. I love you as well, and when it comes to hiding it from my parents... don't bother, they might be naïve but not even *they* could miss my yearning for you and the looks we shared before the battle at Swordsbane."

Regina wished she could rejoice in Emma's words but her heart felt like it was encased in thorny branches, and any attempt to free it with Emma's returned love or the hope of them being together, just brought the snaring branches tighter, because she did not deserve Emma's love and soon she would probably lose it. Soon Emma would know that her mother had been right, that she was a monster.

Emma watched the various emotions fleet over Regina's face like clouds and found her own curiosity getting the better of herself. "Perhaps we should go join my parents so you can tell us what happened? Just remember three things. One, no matter what happened... I am not frightened away so easily. Two, redemption and forgiveness is always possible. Three, I love you and I fully expect more kisses when this is over."

"When I have told you what I did you won't wish to kiss me again," Regina said in a thick, emotion-filled voice.

Emma moved her gaze from Regina's eyes, with their tear-smudged black makeup, down to her full, ruby-red lips and sighed breathlessly as she stared at them and said, "I very much doubt *that*."

The tiniest hint of a smile played at the corners of Regina's mouth as she replied, "we'll see. Let's go have some refreshments and then I'll begin my tale."

Regina walked past Emma and headed for the doors. Emma rushed after, almost limping with the stiffness in her legs. Regina looked at her clumsy walking and knitted her brows. She raised her hands as if to do magic but then lowered them again and swallowed hard. Then she took a breath, sought out Emma's eyes and oh so quietly mumbled "I can heal you completely if you let me. It will not take long."

"*Oh fuck yes*," Emma panted, tired of being brave.

The rarely-used and highly un-regal profanity made Regina laugh despite herself. She walked over to the blonde and gently placed her hands on Emma's bare upper arms, she closed her eyes and directed

her potent magic into every fibre of Emma's being. If Abigail's magic had been a slowly mending flow, Regina's magic was an *all-healing rush* and Emma's eyesight filled with white light as the magic worked through her fast and efficiently.

When Regina's hands left Emma's arms the blonde felt.... invincible. Her body felt as healthy and hearty as if she had never injured it in her life, she felt energised and strong and the feeling of vibrancy seemed to only up her dormant sexual need for Regina. As her sea-green eyes opened to look at the sad woman who had just healed her, she found herself fighting the urge to fall to her knees and bunch up Regina's dress and ravish the brunette's sex with her mouth.

This wasn't the time or the situation and her arousal shamed Emma. *Not now*, she thought to herself, *not yet*.

"Thank you," she said with a huge smile instead. "That was amazing."

Regina almost looked embarrassed at the praise and kept her voice neutral as she replied "well, it's nothing that you could not learn to do. If you still wish to practice magic, that is."

Emma shrugged with a grin and said, "I will if you will teach me. If not, I'll keep on turning footmen into crabs and setting things on fire."

Regina shook her head, hiding a faint smile, and continued walking to the door. Emma followed her, enjoying how her legs seemed strong enough to run around the kingdom without a break. As they left the room the two guards on post nodded to Emma and made a move to follow them. With a stopping hand gesture Emma motioned them to continue their patrol around the castle instead of following them. There would no doubt already be guards in the reception room.

When the blonde and the brunette arrived in the long corridor that cut across the first floor of the castle, Regina turned to Emma with a quizzical look and asked, "where to now, your Majesty?"

Emma smiled at her. It was strange, she had a knot in her stomach from the fear of what Regina might have done but it was so overpowered by the happy fluttering of her heart that she felt like she might forget all her own principles, values and morals if that was what it took to keep Regina with her.

Emma couldn't recognise this feature in herself, this feeling of that she could and would forgive Regina anything. There was a fear deep in Emma that whispered that she might just enjoy Regina's darker side, that it might be... liberating to not also be a hero and an example.

But the main crux of Emma's belief that she could, and would, forgive was how she felt about the woman next to her. She had never felt this connected to another human being, and feeling the brunette's magic still hum in her veins made that feeling of connection even stronger. No matter what depths of human darkness and cruelty Regina had fallen into, she could get her out! She wanted to make Regina smile, to make Regina call her *Princess* in that playful tone again and most of all, she wanted to lead Regina back to the right path so they could be together.

Emma swallowed her overwhelming need to laugh and cry at the same time and just held her hand out to the right and said "this way, *your Majesty*."

Regina flinched at hearing Emma use her new title and gave a curt nod without meeting Emma's gaze. They walked in silence towards the Queen's reception room. Emma watched Regina's face. Underneath the controlled mask Emma could see glimpses of fear, shame and regret. *What have you done*, Emma wanted to ask her but she knew she had to be patient. Regina had to be allowed to tell this story anyway she could, and preferably after having something to drink and a chance to sit down.

So Emma did the only thing she could think to do, as they walked along in silence she let her fingers brush against Regina's hand, which was clenched into a fist at her side. As by reflex, Regina's fist unfurled and the elegant fingers were free to be entwined with Emma's. The

blonde let her slightly warmer hand grab on tight to Regina's. The brunette first just let her hand rest motionless in Emma's, as if she felt that she didn't even deserve this small comfort, but then, just before they reached the doors, she gave a slight grateful squeeze of Emma's hand. Or was it more out of fear than gratitude?

All too soon, Regina let go and reached her hand out to open the doors to the reception room instead. The room was made out of a white stone and birch beams and felt warmer than the audience chamber and the corridor they had just left. Regina took a deep breath and stepped in.

Regina's tale of regicide and reigning

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Warning for descriptions of gore and cruelty.

What greeted them when they stepped inside the Queen's audience chamber was a long table set with elegant silverware and silver goblets, some filled with honeyed milk and some with wine, next to them were small cups filled with a steaming hot and fragrant liquid. Regina breathed in the scent and recognized it as lavender tea, clearly Snow remembered the drink Regina had loved as a young woman.

Cakes, tarts, scones and assorted glazed fruit was placed on elegant serving plates. Little pots of jam, clotted cream and honey were placed at either end. It looked as if the table had been laid out for at least a dozen guests.

At the table sat Snow, Charming and Red. The doors were flanked by two vigilant-looking guards and the mood in the room was tense.

Regina looked at the three people at the table. Charming was staring at her as if she was a viper who could strike at any moment, Snow looked sad and almost frightened and the werewolf, Regina couldn't remember her name at that exact moment, looked watchful but was also eating a scone slathered in clotted cream, which sort of removed the effect of the watchful gaze.

Regina sat down and under the gaze of the people in the room her posture took on the look of her actual age and not the magically-youthful appearance she wore.

Sending a clear message to her parents and godmother, Emma sat down in the chair next to Regina and handed the brunette a glass of wine.

The sorceress looked at the burgundy liquid in the goblet and felt her stomach protest. "No thank you, just tea for me," she said in a quiet voice which was so unlike Regina Mills that everyone at the table sat up and took notice.

Emma handed her a cup and despite her firm grip on the saucer, everyone could see her hand trembling. Regina took the cup and saucer with the same tremor in her hand and a sad attempt at a polite smile.

Regina took a sip of the hot liquid and felt it burn all the way down her throat and into her stomach. It hurt but that felt appropriate somehow.

"I recommend blowing on it," Red jested right after swallowing down her last bite of scone. "I find it helps with scorching drinks."

Emma shot her a glance but was secretly happy that Red was there to lighten the mood somewhat. Red's no-nonsense but very comforting presence was exactly what they needed right now and Emma had no doubt that her mother had asked Red to stay for exactly that reason.

Regina opened her mouth to give a biting response but closed it soon again. She was so fraught with her self-hatred and her fear of rejection that she didn't even have the will to be sarcastic.

The sound of Regina putting her cup back on her saucer seemed inordinately loud in the quiet room. It was like a gong being banged to announce something, and in this case the announcements was that Regina was about to explain what had happened since they last parted.

"After... after I left you all to return back to the Foxcote's castle and deal with them I seemed to... lose control. I would be the first to admit that ever since I lost my first love and spent some time living on the roads in poverty and starvation I have been less inclined to do what

was morally right than I should," she said with a frown and paused to search for words.

"Survival and bitterness led me to make wrong choices quite often, but I thought I had come a long way from that. I thought I had tamed my darker impulses rather well. It seems that this wasn't true that night. Something in me... snapped. All I could feel was fury and the need for revenge. I felt that all that was left for me now was to be the monster I realised that I must seem to all of you. If I couldn't protect Emma, I could at least avenge her. It was with rage and bloodlust that I went back into that castle and I..." Regina broke off as she stared into her cup of lavender tea, as if she hoped the right words would be swirling in the dark purple liquid.

To steady herself, Regina allowed her right hand to grab the table edge and Emma watched the brunette's knuckles quickly go white with how hard she was holding on.

"I... killed them all, even the two young princes and the innocent flute-player. I made Robert and Desiree watch, frozen in place, as I slit their both their sons' throats and then I..." Regina once again stopped and looked as if she was either about to throw up or burst into tears.

"... then I took out the flute-players heart, crushed it into sand and threw it in Robert's face. When I then freed him from his frozen state I allowed him to lunge towards me in an attack, his eyes filled with murder and grief, and then I magically... *turned him inside out.*"

At the sound of those words, Snow made a stifled noise behind the hand she had clasped to her mouth. Charming looked appalled and Red was staring down at her hands while swallowing hard. But Regina wasn't looking at any of them. She was looking at Emma. She was waiting to see hate, fear, disgust and loathing in those beautiful, clever eyes. When all she could see was tears welling up in the green eyes, she continued hoarsely.

"As he bled out on the floor, without even having had the chance to scream, I did the same to his wife. I just... turned her inside out. As I

looked at her entrails and blood pouring out over the carpeted floor, all I could sense in myself was blackness and fire. I felt no remorse or any real human feelings. It was as if I had left my body and just become a mindless creature killing for the sake of killing," Regina's voice broke on the last word and she swallowed hard before continuing.

"I walked out of that room and passed through the halls with the intent of slaying every servant and guard I could see, but it was as if my magic and body had become as switched off as my heart and mind. I just trudged along the halls with blood marking my steps and heard nothing but silence, despite the people running away from me and screaming."

Regina's grip on the table was so tight now that Emma assumed that the brunette's long nails were burrowing into the wood. Emma felt like she couldn't breathe. It was like the air in the room had all been used up by the words describing this horror.

"No one else died that night but as I woke the next morning, covered in dried blood splatter and slumped in a chair in the throne room, I felt like a part of my soul had died. I considered setting the castle ablaze and perish in the flames together with the memories of the night before, but before I had a chance to act on the impulse I heard a voice I recognized."

Regina gave a mirthless chuckle. "It said *well that was a bit of an overreaction*. I looked up and saw Maleficent. She was standing next to me with her hand on my shoulder. She said she had *felt* my rage burn through the night and had tried to stay away, after our dramatic past she didn't feel like she should get involved, but in the end her remaining care for me rose up and she came to make sure I didn't go any further into darkness. She said that our old bond had allowed her to feel... other things from the past few weeks. Feelings of hope and... well... love from inside me."

Regina cleared her dry throat and took another sip of her lavender tea so she could continue.

"I won't bore you with the details but just explain that Maleficent used my love and need for Emma, and her own harsh method of kicking someone until they stand up and remember how to fight back, to get me back to sanity. Then I spent a few days struggling with my demons and being convinced that I was not worthy of even being in Emma's presence until Maleficent forced me to face my fear and come here to let you all decide whether I was worthy or not," Regina stopped speaking to dry a drop of blood off her lip. Apparently she had bitten her cheek while speaking and just now noticed, but it didn't really seem to matter. She had to finish her explanation.

"Mal seemed to believe that I might have a chance to be allowed to earn your forgiveness, both for failing to protect Emma and for my cruel, murderous rampage. I do not. But I might as well come here and let you hate me as I hide in my bed chamber and hate myself," Regina finished with faked-calm in her voice and let go of the teacup that she was close to crushing with her desperate grip on it.

The room was once again quiet which just made the metal-sound of the royal guard to the left of the door unsheathing his sword a few inches, getting ready to attack the woman sitting in front of him, all the more obvious.

At that sound Regina closed her eyes and stopped her breath as if preparing for the sword to enter her at any second, only to open them when Snow's voice broke the silence.

"Oh, *do* put that back into the sheath," Snow said in a strained and high-pitched voice.

The guard slowly let the sword drop back in and returned to his guarding stance with a confused frown.

Regina seemed to start breathing again but still looked down into her half-empty cup.

Snow continued speaking, this time addressing Regina, "I can never condone what you did, nor can I pretend to be happy about it, but we

all knew what was about to happen when I sent you back into that castle. And I *did send you back into that castle*, partly to get you away from Emma in a possibly misguided attempt to protect her, and partly because I knew that you would do what I could not - hurt the people who wanted to hurt my little girl."

At this, Charming reached out his hand and took Snow's in a show of support. Emma merely grimaced at being called a little girl, but didn't say anything.

Snow gave her husband a faint smile before turning back to Regina and continuing, "I was frightened, angry and confused and I blamed you. You had been frightening me for a while because I couldn't understand or read you and because I could see you building a bond with my daughter that I didn't expect a *woman* who is more than *twice her age* to make with her. Then I saw Emma hurt, within a hairsbreadth of death, and you walk away without even a speck of dust on you.... I snapped too. I lashed out and drove you to desperation. I have to take some responsibility for your actions that night and because of that and for the simple fact that this family believes in forgiveness, I would like to try and mend our differences and move on."

Everyone in the room looked at Snow in surprise but then Charming squeezed her hand and quietly said, "and I will try to follow my wife's excellent example and try to forgive. But it will not be easy for me, I fully believe that you are not to blame for being unable to protect Emma during the fall, Regina. But the massacre in Swordsbane... it will take me a while to come to terms with being in company of someone able to do that. You have my word that I will try, though."

Regina nodded to him as if in shock, as if she couldn't believe her ears that she was to be granted this.

Emma looked at Red to see what her godmother would say. Red looked back and kept her eyes on Emma as she said "I don't like the trait of cruelty in people, but I do like the trait of fierce protectiveness and loving so much that it makes you mad. Those murders were acts of

madness, it doesn't forgive them but it explains them. Like Charming, I will try to look past them."

Then Red looked at Regina with a stern look and Regina gave her a grateful nod to show her understanding. Red sighed and then spoke again. "I think we need to leave Emma and Regina alone to allow them to speak freely, but before we do, I have to know how you became Queen?"

Regina gave another mirthless laugh. "Well that was once again down to Maleficent, I must admit. The morning that she woke me and kept me from burning the castle down, she noticed the servants and villagers come creeping back towards the castle. She walked out into the courtyard and informed them that a new Queen had conquered the throne. When they grumbled she reminded them of how the village with my shop in it had made the community flourish and how my magic had put Swordsbane on the map," Regina said and shook her head at the strangeness of it.

She cleared her throat and continued. "Mal reminded them of all the times I had cured their ailments and given them magical solutions to their problems and suggested that in these dangerous times, having a magical monarch might just be the thing that would keep peace and continuity in the ruling of Swordsbane. I don't know if they agreed or if they didn't dare to *disagree* but they accepted me as their ruler and the servants and guards came back in and strangely... swore fealty to me in my blooded and drained state. I haven't made a lot of changes yet, as I have been occupied with soul searching and self-loathing, but I intend to try and live up to my new role and make amends for the lives I took that night and the ones I took in my youth, by improving the lives of people in Swordsbane."

"I see," Red said. "Well I'm sure there is much more to find out and no doubt we will be asking many more questions and laying down many more rules for your conduct towards Emma. But I am sure that her parents will agree when I say that the person you have to convince most here... is Emma herself. Shall we go and leave them to it?" Red asked in the direction of Snow and Charming.

Charming frowned. "But... what kind of future could they have and how are we to be sure that Emma is safe and how..."

Snow stopped her husband from speaking by petting his cheek and tenderly mumbling, "those are all questions to be answered *after* Emma and Regina have spoken privately, my sweet. Come, let's leave them alone."

Snow took his hand and led him out the door, all while he cast glances at Emma who tried to smile reassuringly at him.

Before she followed Snow and Charming out of the room, Red leaned in and whispered in Regina's ear, "no matter what happens, know this... If you hurt any of these three people *I will kill you and eat you*, even if your magic kills me as I do it."

Regina turned her face to look the taller brunette straight in the eye and said, "good, I promise that I will not try to stop you."

Red looked back and nodded to show that the agreement was struck and that Regina was in her good books now. The lycanthrope left and gestured for the guards to follow her, which they reluctantly did.

Alone in the room, Emma glanced up at Regina who had gone back to staring into her teacup. Emma tried to think of what to say. As the words would not come to her, she merely reached out her hand and took Regina's in her own. She held the slightly cooler hand in the same way as she had when they walked into the room and the gesture made Regina's terrified heart overspill with relief. She looked up at Emma and did nothing to hide the tears that once again were trickling down her cheeks.

A heart to heart

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Remember that since Regina never chased Snow White and Charming... they never got around to abduct Maleficent's baby and put all of Emma's darkness into Lily. Here Emma is untampered with. This is after all, an altered fairytale. ;) This is the next to last chapter, I'm afraid.

Emma hesitated. What did you do with a Regina Mills who wasn't just suddenly *vulnerable* but also *crying*? In a clumsy attempt to both cheer her instructor up and comfort her, Emma did what she had done after Regina conjured that green armchair, she walked over and plonked herself in Regina's lap.

Regina laughed through her sobs and put an arm around Emma to keep her from sliding off. Considering the narrow chair Regina was sitting in, this wasn't comfortable for either of them and Emma had to struggle to decide where her long legs would end up.

Regina started to lean her face against Emma's chest but then stopped, as if unsure of her own actions. Emma got the feeling that crying on someone's shoulder wasn't something Regina had ever really done. Emma solved the problem by pulling Regina too her, almost smothering the older woman to her chest, and making Regina laugh once more as she got into a position where she could lean her head against Emma's chest and still breathe.

"You know, I think it took a great deal of bravery for you to tell all of that story," Emma said. "You could easily have glossed over the

details. I mean we all surmised that you must have killed them if you took over the throne. You could have said there was a fight and you won, but instead you told us of what you had done and that was very brave."

"I wanted you to know what I was. What I was capable of. I couldn't stand looking at you and knowing that you had a rosier view of me than the truth would paint," Regina mumbled.

Emma searched for the right words. "Well... I know it all now. And while I don't condone the murder of the innocents or the way you... disposed of Robert and Desiree, I do, in a twisted way, understand what would make you do it."

"I'm glad you see it that way. Mal wouldn't stop making jokes about how I had always secretly hated flute-players," Regina grumbled.

Emma laughed and had to cover her mouth to stop the inappropriate reaction.

"It is NOT funny. That poor musician had done nothing wrong, he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I cannot stop regretting his death," Regina muttered and massaged her forehead with her free hand.

Emma gently removed Regina's hand and kissed it. "And that is exactly why we all feel we can try to forgive you and allow you to make amends. Your regret and self-hatred shows that you have a good heart underneath all that fury and darkness."

Regina gave a mirthless laugh. "*A good heart?* My heart is blacker than midnight."

Emma moved away from Regina to look the brunette in the eye. "Really? Take it out and show me then."

Regina stared at her incredulously.

Emma looked back with a serious expression. "You once told me we could take one of our hearts out and see what happens if you lick it, well this is an even better reason than strange experiments. Show me your heart."

Regina hesitated for a moment. She didn't want Emma to see the physical evidence of all her dark deeds, but then, if Emma saw it for herself... she would know what she was getting herself into.

She ran a hand in front of her face, returning her painted eyes to perfection and not the smudged, tear-stained mess they had become. Then she reached the same hand down to her own chest to tear out her heart, but she quickly realised there wasn't enough room between her body and Emma's to extricate her heart.

She cleared her throat and muttered, "you will have to move."

"Of course," Emma said and stood and smoothed down her dress while looking expectantly at Regina.

Regina sighed as she wondered if this was a giant mistake and then reached into her chest to grasp her heart and pull it out. When it was in her hand it glowed and pulsed in soot-black and bright red, the two colours swirling together as if trying to mix.

Emma looked at it mesmerized. "It's beautiful! Can I... Can I hold it?"

Regina swallowed hard but figured that since she had already admitted being in love with Emma she might as well physically *give the woman her heart*. With a trembling hand she held it out to the blonde and Emma gently took it.

The blonde held it in both her outstretched hands and looked at it as if it was a fragile but precious treasure. Emma tilted her head as she peered at it and said, "I think there is more red than black. That is good, right?"

Regina had to admit that surprisingly, it DID look like there was marginally more red than black. She shuddered to think what would have happened if her life had been even worse than it had turned out.... Would she have made her own heart black as pitch then?

In reply to Emma's question she hoarsely muttered, "well yes, but it should be bright red. A truly good person's heart would be glowing pure red and nothing else."

Emma kept staring at the heart and murmured, "that sounds dull."

Regina stared at her.

"Well, I mean, someone who is *just good*. That does not even sound like a real human being. We all have dark thoughts, we all lie and we all hurt other people at some point," Emma said as she looked up and noticed Regina's stare.

Regina chuckled. "Yes, well, there is a difference between someone who has a few dark spots on their heart and that mess of black and crimson that you hold in your hands."

Emma moved the heart from her open palms into her right hand and held her arms away from her chest. "Take mine out."

Regina stared at her again. "Pardon?"

"Remove my heart and look at it."

Regina frowned but didn't feel up to debating it. She reached into Emma's chest and tried to be as gentle as she could as she took out the beating heart. When she had it in her hand she stared at it in shock. It was red alright, but it had long, thin streaks of black lining, making it appear almost striped.

Emma smiled at her. "No one is just good and pure, Regina. I grew up in a home with two people always trying to be perfect, obviously I rebelled. Nothing too detrimental of course, but let's just say that those

footmen who got turned into crustaceans... well, that was not necessarily *an accident*. Granted, I didn't know that I could actually do it, but I purposefully tried to. I've been jealous of other girls, I've taunted the foreign princes who were afraid of me and when I was 18 I seduced my tutor, being well aware that he could lose his job and possibly his head for bedding me."

Regina looked at the red, pulsing heart with its thin, black stripes and gave the sort of smirk that Emma hadn't seen since before the battle of Swordsbane. "So the sweet, sainted princess isn't so pure after all?"

Emma shook her head. "Of course not. I strive to be a good person but I make mistakes and I am after all, only human. Because of those black stripes, I am more likely to forgive you than my parents are, and I believe that I am more suited to be with you due to them as well. I can understand your dark impulses but I know how to ignore them or to channel them into... more acceptable activities."

"Acceptable activities? " Regina queried with a raised eyebrow.

"Remember the night before we tried to free the captured sorceress?" Emma asked with a smile and ran a thumb over Regina's heart, which was still beating happily in her hand.

"How could I forget?" Regina purred as she remembered her lover taking her in ways very unsuited to the appetites of a young, sweet princess.

"If you need to let your darker thoughts escape your mind, let them escape with me in our bedchamber," Emma said with her gaze fixed on anything but Regina's smirking face.

"OUR bedchamber?" Regina drawled in surprise.

Emma blushed. "Well, now that you are royal I supposed that you and I could..."

Regina beamed. "Yes?"

"Well, royal alliances are created through marriage. It would be what was best for both our kingdoms," Emma said quickly and kept her eyes from meeting Regina's.

Regina felt the amusement of watching Emma squirm and the otherworldly bliss of thinking that after all this... Emma actually wanted to *marry her*! Still she couldn't help but play with the blushing blonde.

The new queen of Swordsbane quirked an eyebrow. "Oh, so you wish to marry me for the sake of *our kingdoms*?"

Emma's blush was getting worse and spreading from an attractive red-tint of her cheeks to colour her entire face the hue of pink roses.

Emma stammered, "w-well not only because of that, I happen to think you might make me a good wife."

Regina looked at her with raised eyebrows, a sarcastic twist of her mouth and her arms crossed over her chest, Emma's heart still safe in one of her hands.

Emma laughed and felt some of her embarrassment seep away. "Alright, I happen to think that we'll make a good match. Does that sound better?"

Regina nodded with a smile but then looked pensive. "What will your parents say? What will our subjects say about us both being women?"

Emma looked troubled but shrugged anyway. "About the same as they will say about our *dangerous* magic powers, they will grumble, curse and gossip. There might be a rebellion or two, but it is nothing we can't handle. They will come around when they see that we are good and caring rulers. I think we will have to work more on my parents than on our subjects."

Regina pursed her lips and furrowed her brow. "Agreed. We will work on them slowly though, I will suggest to them that I visit you often to

continue your magic lessons. I will try to talk to them then."

Emma thought about this for a few seconds. "Alright, but what about your kingdom while you are here teaching me? You can't just leave it without anyone in that castle."

"Ah yes, well, Maleficent had an idea for that too. She suggested that I seek out my parents and return their memories. While my mother is a power-hungry and selfish woman, she does know how to rule people and my father has the kindness and experience of a royal family that she does not. I will return their memories and insure that they help me rule MY kingdom the way I wish," Regina said in a severe tone.

She clenched her jaw slightly and continued. "The first sign of my mother trying to take over or manipulating me and I will send her back without her memories. I do feel that she deserves another chance though, if I am to get a chance to atone my sins... so should she. At least ONE chance. Besides, I have missed my father and his guidance. I haven't seen either of them since I was a teenager, perhaps the years have changed them. I know they have changed me."

The room was silent for a few beats as they both stood there, clasping each other's hearts and thinking about the changes about to cease their lives.

Emma cleared her throat. "Maleficent seems to have given you good advice. So... is Maleficent still in the Foxcote's... I mean *your* castle in Swordsbane? Is she to remain there?" Emma asked as she faked nonchalance.

It didn't work. Regina sensed the hint of jealousy trickling into the innocent questions.

"No, Mal will return to the Forbidden Fortress. She informed me that she has a lover waiting for her there and they have an egg as well. I know, I know... that sounds preposterous. But she is half-dragon so I suppose an egg makes some sort of sense. Anyway, it is more preposterous to have children at her age! She always wanted children

but I never felt ready and so I thought she had given up on the plan, but clearly, she now has a little hatchling to keep her busy."

Emma seemed suddenly stricken but tried to hide it. "So... you don't want children?"

"I didn't. However, I have been wondering about that decision, and the idea of reconciling with my mother has only made that stronger, but I am too old to be a mother," Regina replied with a dismissive wave.

"I am not," Emma said in a small voice.

Regina smiled at her. "No, and neither you nor the world should be denied a little stubborn, clumsy, blonde princess or prince running round this castle. Our kingdoms need an heir, don't they? I can magically create life in that slender abdomen of yours or we can take in an orphan. Our options suddenly seem... endless."

"I know, it's all rather frightening," Emma laughed and looked at the heart in her hand as her thumb ran across it once more.

"No need to be frightened as long as I am around. That time when you fell from the window was the first and the last time I couldn't protect you. From now on I intend to never fail at that again," Regina promised solemnly.

Regina looked down on the heart in her hand and on the much darker one in Emma's hand. "Well, what say you, Princess? Should we try your preposterous licking experiment?"

The blonde nodded gleefully and looked at least ten years younger than her 25 summers. At almost the same time Emma reached down and gave Regina's magical heart a long lick with the broad of her tongue while Regina gave a dainty flick with the tip of her tongue on Emma's heart.

They both stared at each other and then Emma shook her head. "I cannot believe it, I felt nothing! That was hugely disappointing!"

Regina laughed and said, "how about I poof into your room tonight and lick you in places that you will most certainly feel?"

Emma gave a huge grin and purred "why, *yes please*, your Majesty."

Then she looked down at the heart in her hand. "You know, that big bright bit right there... I think I can take credit for that one."

Regina walked over and first placed Emma's heart back in the blonde's chest and then looked at her own heart and the spot Emma was referring to.

"Yes, I think you're right. That spot of good has returned from the charity of me putting up with your bumbling manner, slow study skills and ridiculous questions!"

Emma glared at her and then reached her free hand out to smack Regina's behind hard.

"Not so violent, Princess! Save the darkness for the bedroom, remember?" Regina said and beamed a smile so big and heartfelt that Emma felt like it lit up the room.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One year later.

Regina stalked across the room, pacing back and forth. Her long crimson dress was sweeping the floor like an angry cat's tail.

"Calm down, dearest. Don't let them rattle you," Emma said soothingly.

Regina stopped and stared at the blonde who had come to tell her that her father was not just insisting on that the marriage was held in their castle, but that he wanted to arrange a big tournament to make the already week long wedding celebration last for yet another week. Or maybe two more weeks.

"*Don't let them rattle me?* I suppose by *them* you mean your father and my mother. If I have to sit through another pre-wedding debate on where the wedding will be held, who will wear what and how the ceremony will look... I am going to flay someone," Regina almost screamed in frustration.

Emma walked up to her and took the older woman's hands in her own.

"Look, they both want what is best for us. It's just that my parents are wedding crazy and want to arrange everything from the sugar flowers on the cake to the royal crest that our family will take. And your mother... your mother is..." Emma broke off as she searched for the right word.

Emma got on well with Cora despite everything. Both Henry and Cora had been spending the last year reacquainting themselves with their long lost daughter and trying to earn her trust, and Emma had to admit that she enjoyed Henry's sweetness and Cora's wit. But her mother in law could be somewhat difficult when someone else wanted to take the lead and this drove Regina mad and Emma... well, it made her mainly tired and with a slight headache.

"Stubborn? Infuriating? Meddlesome?" Regina suggested as descriptions for what her mother was.

"...convinced that she knows what's best for her daughter," Emma corrected with a patient smile.

"Will we ever be free of them?" Regina groaned and realised that if it hadn't been for Emma, she would have been missing the days when it was just her and her apothecary shop with its magic side-line.

Emma shrugged. "Yes, when they pass away. Then we will rule both this and my parent's kingdom and I will miss them all terribly and you will wish you hadn't wanted to be free of them all."

Regina glared at her but didn't refute Emma's words. Instead she changed the topic.

"What is this about Abigail and Fredrick wanting to give us an extravagant wedding gift? Has Abigail suddenly inherited her father's gift for turning things into gold and is giving us a golden castle?" Regina growled, still annoyed and stressed by the fuss made over the upcoming wedding.

Emma caressed the slightly cooler hands held in her own and said, "well, they want to show their gratitude for what we did. After all, we did save Abigail from the Foxcote's clutches and you... ridding us of Robert, Desiree and their heirs meant that Frederick was released from the dungeons and returned to his wife."

Regina rolled her eyes at her soon-to-be bride. "Yes, my love, I understood *why* they wanted to give us a large present. But why does everyone keep making such a fuss about this surprise that they are giving us? What is it?"

"Well... actually, my mother did tell me what it is. I'm afraid she was never good with keeping secrets. Are you sure you want to know?" Emma asked as she lovingly rubbed Regina's knuckles with her thumbs.

"Yes. Tell me. I promise to act extremely surprised when I see it," Regina scoffed.

"Fine, in honour of you freeing them, and taking on raven form twice during that night, they have captured and trained 200 ravens to come to you when you make a clicking sound with your mouth."

Regina stared at her for a long time. Her facial expression was stony except for the eyebrows that slowly rose up her forehead. When she opened her mouth she intoned, "that is the dumbest present I have ever heard of" in a deep and serious voice.

The effect was so comical that Emma laughed so hard she almost had tears in her eyes had to lean her head on the slightly shorter woman's shoulder. Through her laughing fit she said, "I know! They should have just given us some ceremonial weaponry or a statue like everyone else, but no, they have had people training ravens for the last six months!"

Regina wasn't laughing, she was shaking her head at the stupidity of the world with a grave expression.

Just as Emma had stopped laughing at her lover's baffled, irritated and very serious response to the odd present, Regina opened her mouth once more to say, "but I could get 200 ravens with magic! If I were to ever want 200 ravens, that is! What are they meant to do for me? It's not like they are falcons who could attack or help with spotting prey

for the hunt, they are ravens! All they can do is carry messages or cover your mother's carriage in bird faeces."

At the sound of Regina's infuriated tone, Emma began laughing again and panted out the words, "never mind about the ravens! We need to arrange another council with both our sets of parents and discuss the wedding! That is what I came here to talk to you about."

Regina took her hands out of Emma's and placed them around the blonde's waist. She could feel the structure of the corset and longed to take Emma's clothes off so she could feel the skin underneath instead.

She was grateful for the magic which allowed them to poof to each other's rooms, although it was better when Regina did it as Emma still had a strange tendency to poof to the scullery, but she still longed for when they were married and lived under the same roof. She planned to have her new bride naked at least half of their time together.

"Fine, I and my parents will travel to your kingdom tomorrow and we can make the final arrangements. It's impossible to plan a wedding if we can't even decide in what castle it is to be held. Emma... your parents aren't being difficult simply because they don't want me to marry you, are they?" Regina asked with a note of worry laced into her tone.

Emma stroked Regina's cheek and let her thumb reach out to caress Regina's lip scar. "Of course not, my love. They are quick to anger when someone they love is hurt but they forgive easily and gladly. My mother is back to adoring you like she did as a girl, well, *when she isn't afraid of you* and my father... well, he will never think anyone is good enough for me so I think it will take him a few more years to really grow to love you. But they want me to be happy and I won't be truly happy until I can take you to bed as my lawfully wedded wife."

Regina smiled and leant in to brush her lips, today painted raspberry red, against Emma's pink lips. They kissed for a while until Emma pulled away and spoke in a slightly breathless voice.

"Speaking of bedding each other, haven't your forgotten something? Weren't you meant to punish me for my lack of concentration when I was learning how to morph into a wolf yesterday?"

Regina laughed her low, melodic laugh. "Sometimes I think you only persevere with your magic lessons because you like the system of punishments and rewards!"

"Don't say that, you have a plethora of things to teach me and I intend to learn them all! If... I can just remember to focus, that is," Emma said sweetly with a sexy little pout, one which she had clearly learned from her soon-to-be wife.

Regina reached out and grabbed Emma's wrists with her own hands and then hissed, "I will spank some *focus* into that soft little ass of yours right now."

In the blink of an eye, they disappeared from the library they had been standing in to Regina's large and soundproofed bedchamber in a puff of purple smoke.

Emma looked into Regina's suddenly dark eyes which glittered with anticipation and arousal and felt that familiar fluttering in her chest. She trusted Regina with her life and she loved her with every fibre of her being... but there was still that tiny grain of fear when Regina's dark side showed. That tiny grain of fear that Emma loved to overcome again and again. As Emma bunched up her dress to take her punishment she was already planning how she would ravish Regina when the punishment was concluded.

That is where this tale ends. You see, in this altered fairytale there was no need for a glittering, flawless fairy tale ending. All that was needed here was acceptance, safety, passion, challenges and love – much like in my life and yours – and those were things that Regina and Emma had in abundance. And with that we should leave them to their fun, after all... they deserve it if they are going to face the wedding planning with their families soon. Shhh, close the door quietly behind you.

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